

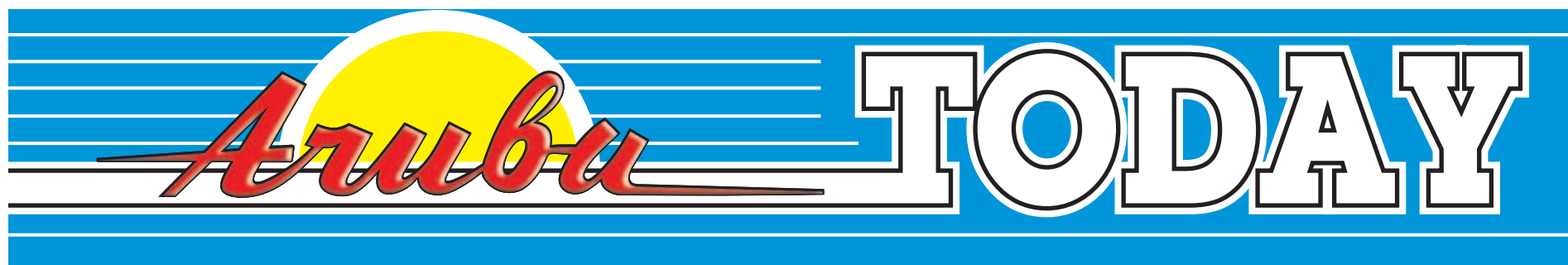
SNOW SNARLING KERRY'S SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY WORK

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UKRAIN PRESIDENT MEETS WITH HEADS OF OPPOSITION

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On Top Of The News Email: news@arubatoday.com website: www.arubatoday.com Tel: +297 582-7800 Saturday, December 14, 2013

Cold Comfort



2 Hurt, 1 Dead In Colorado School Shooting

Students comfort each other at Arapahoe High School in Centennial, Colo., on Friday, Dec. 13, 2013, where a student shot at least one other student at a Colorado high school Friday before he killed himself, authorities said. The shooter entered Arapahoe High School in a Denver suburb armed with a shotgun and looking for a teacher he identified by name, said Arapahoe County Sheriff Grayson Robinson.

(AP Photo/Ed Andrieski)

DAN ELLIOTT
Associated Press
CENTENNIAL, Colorado (AP)
— A student shot at least one other student before

he apparently killed himself at a high school in Colorado, a state in the grips of a bitter debate over the future of its gun laws.

The shooter entered Arapahoe High School in a Denver suburb armed with a shotgun and looking for a teacher he identified

by name, said Arapahoe County Sheriff Grayson Robinson. The teacher immediately left the school when he

learned the student was looking for him, Robinson said.

Continued on page 4

Mideast snow snarls Kerry's shuttle diplomacy

ISABEL KERSHNER

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JERUSALEM - Along with the travails of trying to make peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, Secretary of State John Kerry

gion, brought the heaviest December snowfall to the Jerusalem area since the 1950s, according to the authorities. Speaking to reporters here on Friday morning before a meeting with Prime Min-

ister Benjamin Netanyahu the night before. There, he met with the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, but the session was cut short because of the deteriorating road conditions. Thanking the

West Bank city of Ramallah the night before. There, he met with the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, but the session was cut short because of the deteriorating road conditions. Thanking the

Kerry prodded the sides back to negotiating in July, after years of stagnation. Nine months were allotted for the process. Officials say that Kerry's team, which is participating in the talks, may present a framework of principles in the next few weeks. While few details have emerged from the talks, they have recently focused on the question of control over the Jordan Valley, the area of the West Bank bordering on Jordan. Kerry was accompanied by John R. Allen, a retired Marine general who has presented the U.S. security proposals to both the Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Israel insists on maintaining a long-term military presence in the Jordan Valley, saying that it cannot rely on foreign forces to prevent the smuggling of advanced weapons that could be used against it. A Palestinian official involved in the talks said that the Americans had "adopted the Israeli security doctrine" and were proposing an Israeli military presence in the West Bank for 10 years, an idea the Palestinian official said was "unacceptable."



The motorcade carrying U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry passes the Israeli Arab village of Abu Ghosh en route to the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv Friday, Dec. 13, 2013.

(AP Photo/Brian Snyder)

had a new problem on Friday: a major Middle East snowstorm.

The storm, which began early Thursday and has affected much of the re-

gion, brought the heaviest December snowfall to the Jerusalem area since the 1950s, according to the authorities. Speaking to reporters here on Friday morning before a meeting with Prime Min-

ister Benjamin Netanyahu the night before. There, he met with the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, but the session was cut short because of the deteriorating road conditions. Thanking the

in Tel Aviv before departing for Asia, was "a key issue," particularly because of what he called the threat of external terrorism against Israel.

South Africa interpreter allegedly accused of murder

JOHN ELIGON

© 2013 New York Times

QUNU, South Africa - The South African government said Friday that it was looking into media reports that the man hired to provide deaf interpretation at Nelson Mandela's memorial service had once been accused of murder and other serious crimes. The reports added new intrigue to the scandal surrounding the supposed interpreter, who used incomprehensible sign language and later said he was a violence-prone schizophrenic who hallucinated.

The South African television station eNCA reported Friday that the man, Thamsanqa Jantjie, 34, who has been accused of providing bogus interpretation as he stood beside many world leaders during the memorial service Tuesday, had been charged with murder in 2003. He also faced charges of rape, theft, housebreaking, malicious damage to property, attempted murder and kidnapping, dating to 1994, according to the news station.

A spokesman for the country's National Prosecuting

Authority, Nathi Mncube, said the agency could not confirm or deny the report, because it was still searching for criminal records on Jantjie. The news station said it had taken less than 48 hours for it to uncover Jantjie's record. The murder charge was resolved in 2006, the news station said, but the nature of the disposition was unclear. Multiple attempts to reach Jantjie by telephone Friday for comment on the news station's report were unsuccessful.

Deeply embarrassed by the scandal, the govern-

ment has promised a full investigation into how Jantjie got the job. Sign language experts worldwide were outraged by Jantjie's performance, saying he had made a mockery of sign language interpretation during the memorial service.

His story became more bizarre Thursday when Jantjie was quoted in multiple interviews as saying he had schizophrenia, sometimes reacted violently and had seen angels descending into the Soweto sports stadium where the Mandela memorial was held. □

The experience of Gaza has hardened Israelis. Israel unilaterally withdrew from the Palestinian coastal territory in 2005. Hamas, the Islamic militant group, won Palestinian elections in 2006 and seized full control of Gaza a year later after internal fighting there. Gaza then became armed with advanced weapons that were smuggled through tunnels at the Egypt border, including long-range rockets capable of hitting Tel Aviv.

Kerry described the latest talks in Ramallah as constructive and "always complicated." He thanked both Netanyahu and Abbas for "the serious way in which they are pursuing these discussions."

Because of the storm, tens of thousands of Israelis and Palestinians were without electricity on Friday.

Main highways leading in and out of Jerusalem were closed for hours. □

Scientist in U.S. charged in seed theft conspiracy

JEANNIE NUSS

Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Arkansas (AP)

— A detention hearing is set to get underway Friday for one of two agricultural scientists from China accused of conspiring to steal seeds for commercial espionage from a research facility in Kansas.

Prosecutors said Wengui Yan and Weiqiang Zhang arranged for a Chinese delegation to visit the U.S. this year and that customs agents found stolen seeds in the delegation's luggage before the group flew back to China.

Yan, of Stuttgart, Arkansas, and Zhang, of Manhattan, Kansas, are charged with conspiracy to steal trade secrets. Zhang's hearing is set for Tuesday in Kansas. Attorneys for the men didn't immediately respond to emails seeking comment on Friday.

Also this week, prosecutors in Iowa said six men from China including the CEO of a seed corn subsidiary of a Chinese conglomerate have been charged with conspiring to steal patented seed corn from two of America's leading seed developers.

It wasn't immediately clear if the cases in Kansas and Iowa are related. But seed developers spend millions of dollars a year to develop new varieties and carefully protect them against theft to maintain a competitive advantage.

Yan worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a research geneticist at the Dale Bumpers National Rice Research Center in Arkansas, and Zhang worked as an agricultural seed breeder for a biopharmaceutical company that has a production facility in Junction City, Kansas, according to a court document filed Thursday in Kansas.

Prosecutors only identified the business where Zhang worked as Company A, but said the business invested about \$75 million in technology used to create seeds. □

Tension eases in Senate ahead of weekend

JEREMY W. PETERS

© 2013 New York Times

WASHINGTON - The partisan tension that has brought business in the Senate to a crawl eased Friday as Democrats and Republicans said they were calling a weekend cease-fire that will allow them to move on to more pressing issues next week like the unfinished budget and defense bills. If the mood for most of the week was sour, on Friday senators seemed more exhausted than anything else, having endured two late-night sessions in a row. Because senators were on the floor at virtually all hours, they worked in shifts. Democrats occupied the presiding officer's chair while Republicans took turns speaking from the floor to denounce what they said was an effort to

the budget bill, a bipartisan pact that passed the House on Thursday but still faces skepticism from conservatives in the Senate. They also would likely vote on the nomination of Janet L. Yellen to lead the Federal Reserve.

"We're doing our utmost to finish our business here a week from today so that we can go home for Christmas," a less-than-energetic Reid said. "I personally thank the senators for their cooperation this week."

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., summed up the thaw saying, "Both sides didn't want to work over the weekend. Come on! The zeal sometimes dissipates when you get into Thursday. And by Friday, it's gone."

It was a complete turnaround in tone from just a few hours earlier when Re-

percent of the responsibility for it," Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., and usually one of the more reserved members, said Thursday.

"He's going to have 'The End of the Senate' written on his tombstone," Alexander complained.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., called this week "chaotic and confusing, and a shameful waste of time."

"I am loath to cast partisan blame," he added, before doing just that. "But the plain fact is that there is a faction of the Republican Party that is essentially insisting on burning through all of these time deadlines." Republicans, furious that Democrats last month stripped away most of their power to filibuster presidential nominations, are using every procedural barri-

votes at all hours of the day and night.

What members of both parties bemoaned more than anything was not the lack of civility or bipartisan cooperation - which they seem to have given up on long ago - but what they said they see as the irreversible damage inflicted on an institution they claim to revere.

"If Bob Byrd had been here he would have had a stroke," said Sen. Orrin G. Hatch, R-Utah, referring to the late Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, the senator whom Republicans and Democrats hold up as the embodiment of senatorial dignity and forbearance.

Some senators expressed concern that this moodier, more intemperate Senate would become the norm now that Democrats have



The U.S. Capitol before sunrise in Washington, Dec. 13, 2013. The partisan tension that has brought business in the Senate to a crawl eased Friday as Democrats and Republicans said they were calling a weekend cease-fire that will allow them to move on to more pressing issues next week like the unfinished budget and defense bills.

(Doug Mills/The New York Times)

stifle debate and dissent. But the majority leader, Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada, announced late Friday morning that he would allow senators to go home for the weekend and return Monday evening to continue voting on a backlog of President Barack Obama's nominees. By Tuesday they could start debating

publicans and Democrats were quick to assign blame for this latest episode of gridlock: a fight fueled by recent changes Democrats made to stop Republican filibusters of presidential nominations.

"I think it resembles fourth graders playing in a sandbox, and I'll give the majority leader, Harry Reid, 99

cade available to them in the Senate's two-century-old rule book, forcing it to run the clock as long as possible while they vote on a series of Obama's nominees.

Democrats, hoping to make the situation so unpleasant for their colleagues across the aisle that they eventually break, have scheduled

unilaterally changed filibuster rules.

"It's the beginning of what we were worried about," said Sen. Joe Manchin III of West Virginia, one of just three Democrats who did not support the rules change.

"It's just concerning, very much concerning, where it goes from here." □

2 Hurt, 1 Dead In Colorado School Shooting



Sheriffs deputies stand guard over students after they were evacuated to the track and football field at Arapahoe High School in Centennial, Colo., on Friday, Dec. 13, 2013, where a student shot at least one other student at a Colorado high school Friday before he killed himself, authorities said. The shooter entered Arapahoe High School in a Denver suburb armed with a shotgun and looking for a teacher he identified by name, said Arapahoe County Sheriff Grayson Robinson. (AP Photo/Ed Andrieski)

Continued from Front

The shooter then shot two students, one of whom is in serious condition at a hospital. The other is also hospitalized, with a minor gunshot wound. It was initially believed the student in se-

rious condition confronted the shooter, but Robinson now says that wasn't clear. Robinson said the student is believed to have acted alone. Authorities also found a possible Molotov cocktail at the scene and are examining the device. The shooting came a day

before the anniversary of the school massacre in Newtown, Connecticut, where a gunman killed 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Colorado has seen several high-profile shootings. The Arapahoe High School

is just 8 miles (13 kilometers) east of Columbine High School, where two teenage shooters killed 12 classmates and a teacher before killing themselves in 1999. Last year, a shooter killed 12 people at a movie theater in Aurora, another Denver suburb. Earlier this year, Colorado's Democratic Legislature and governor approved a slate of gun control measures, including ammunition magazine limits and expanded background checks. Two Democratic state lawmakers were ousted in recall elections after voting for the measures, and a third resigned to avoid a recall. The backlash was a reflection of the divide in a state known for its hunting and where gun ownership is a treasured right. For one mother who rushed to Arapahoe High School on Friday, it was her second

experience with a school shooting. Tracy Monroe, who was reading text messages from her 15-year-old daughter inside Arapahoe, said she had step-siblings who attended Columbine. A teacher killed in the Columbine shooting, Dave Carpenter, had been a family friend. "We didn't think it could happen in Colorado then, either," Monroe said. Monroe said she got the first text from her daughter, Jade Stanton, at 12:41 p.m. The text read, "there's sirens. It's real. I love you" A few minutes later, Jade texted "shots were fired in our school." Monroe rushed to the school and was relieved when Jade texted that a police officer entered her classroom and that she was safe. More than 2,100 students attend Arapahoe High School, according to the Littleton Public Schools website. □



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US airport worker arrested in Kansas car bomb plot

ROXANA HEGEMAN

Associated Press

WICHITA, Kansas (AP) —

A U.S. avionics technician was arrested Friday on charges that he planned to set off a car bomb at the Wichita airport in an attack intended to support al-Qaida, authorities said. Terry Lee Loewen, 58, who worked at the airport, was arrested before dawn as he tried to enter the tarmac in a vehicle he believed was loaded with high explosives.

But the materials in the car were inert, and no one at the airport was in any immediate danger, authorities said.

Loewen had been under investigation for about six months after making online statements to an undercover agent about wanting to commit "violent jihad" against the United States, U.S. Attorney Barry Grissom said.

Authorities said Loewen spent months studying the layout of the Mid-Continent Regional Airport, its flight patterns and other details to maximize fatalities and damage. During

that time, he developed a plan with other conspirators to use his employee access card to pull off the attack. The conspirators were actually undercover FBI agents.

Loewen planned to die in the explosion, a fate that he said was inevitable in his quest to become a martyr in a jihad against America, according to court documents.

Authorities said they believe Loewen acted alone. No other arrests were expected.

In his online conversations, Loewen talked about downloading documents about jihad, martyrdom and an al-Qaida "manual." He frequently expressed admiration for Anwar Al-Awlaki, the American-born al-Qaida leader who was killed in a 2011 drone strike in Yemen, according to the documents. Al-Awlaki emerged as an influential preacher among militants living in the West, with his English language Internet sermons calling for jihad, or holy war, against the U.S.

In August, an undercover

agent offered to introduce Loewen to someone who could help him engage in jihad. A few days later, he mentioned providing a "tour" of the airport for one of the undercover agents. In September, the undercover agent told Loewen he had returned from overseas after meeting with individuals connected with al-Qaida. The agent told him the "brothers" were excited to hear about his access to the airport and asked Loewen if he would be willing to plant some type of device, the documents said.

"Wow! That's some heavy stuff you just laid down. Am I interested? Yes. I still need time to think about it, but I can't imagine anything short of arrest stopping me," Loewen told the agent, adding he needed to let Allah guide him.

He also asked for reassurances that he wasn't being set up, saying his greatest fear was not completing the operation.

The criminal complaint also details a meeting in November with other undercover agents in which they

discussed executing the plan prior to Christmas in order to cause the greatest physical and economic damage. He also provided components from his employer that the agents requested to wire the fake

tempting to use a weapon of mass destruction, attempting to damage property and attempting to provide support to terrorist group al-Qaida.

Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback joined the U.S. at-



U.S. attorney Barry Grissom announces the arrest of Terry Lee Loewen, 58, of Wichita, Kan., during a news conference on Friday, Dec. 13, 2013 in Wichita, Kan. Grissom said Loewen was arrested Friday morning at Mid-Continent regional airport where he planned to drive a car that he believed was full of explosives into a terminal at the airport.

(AP Photo/The Wichita Eagle, Travis Heying)

explosive device, according to court documents.

On Wednesday, Loewen met with another undercover agent and helped assemble the false bomb. He was charged with at-

torney at the news conference to announce the charges.

"In the ongoing war on terrorism, the good guys won one today," Brownback said. □

Santa visits remote Eskimo village

MARK THIESSEN

Associated Press

KWETHLUK, Alaska (AP) —

Christmas in Alaska came early this week to nearly 300 students attending school in the Yup'ik Eskimo village of Kwethluk.

Thanks to the volunteer program coordinated by the Alaska National Guard, Santa and Mrs. Claus greeted children in the western Alaska community and took pictures with them before helper elves handed out gifts. "Santa and Mrs. Claus is not something that normally happens out there for them. It's commonplace for us

here in Anchorage or the bigger towns to be able to go to the malls and see Santa," said Jo Katkus, the chairwoman of Operation Santa Claus, as she and 24 other volunteers waited early Wednesday morning at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson to load a military C130 cargo plane for the 300 mile (480 kilometer) flight. "For them, it's a real extra treat," she said.

The fact the visit even happened is a testament to the adaptability of Alaskans, whose flight plans change at any given moment because of weather or mechanical issues. □

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US faces new pressure over CIA contractor

LARA JAKES

AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration faced intensified pressure Friday to find former CIA contractor Robert Levinson — both from U.S. lawmakers and the Levinson family — nearly seven years after he disappeared in Iran during what now has been revealed as an unofficial spy mission.

Levinson's family urged the government "to step up and take care of one of its own." Members of Congress said they wanted to know more about the case, which led to three veteran analysts being forced out of the agency and seven others being disciplined. Levinson vanished after a March 2007 meeting with an admitted killer on Kish Island, an Iranian resort. For years, the U.S. publicly described him as a private citizen who traveled to the tiny Persian Gulf island on business. But an Associated Press investigation revealed that Levinson actually was a contractor working for the CIA, and was paid by a team of agency analysts who were acting without authority to run spy operations to gather intelligence. If he is still alive at age 65, Levinson has been captive longer than any other American known to be held overseas. White House spokesman

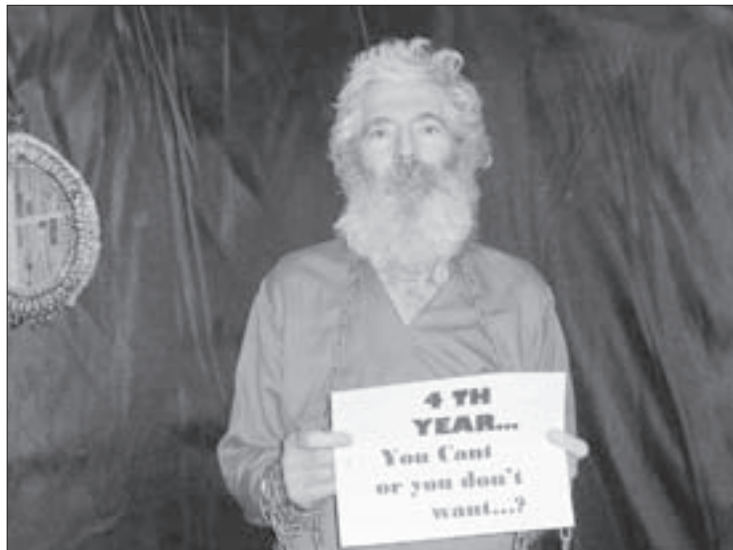
Jay Carney said Levinson, who retired after 28 years at the FBI and Drug Enforcement Administration, was not a U.S. employee at the time of his disappearance. A contractor would not be considered a government employee.

Carney declined to discuss the case in detail but said numerous U.S. officials, including President Barack

Obama, have pressed Iran for help on finding and returning Levinson. "He is in the custody of some pretty bad people," Intelligence Chairman Mike Rogers, a Republican, told Fox News. Other lawmakers said they would seek more answers in Levinson's case, and his family in Florida pleaded for the government to do more.

"After nearly seven years, our family should not be struggling to get through each day without this wonderful, caring man that we love so much," the family said in a statement. Soon after his disappearance, the FBI began asking about Levinson's mission, and the CIA started a formal inquiry into whether anyone at the agency had sent Levinson to Iran or whether he was working for the CIA at the time. CIA analysts acknowledged he had done some work for them but said his contract was out of money. The CIA then told the FBI and Congress that the agency had no current relationship with Levinson, and there was no connection to Iran, according to numerous U.S. officials.

But in October 2007, emails uncovered between Levinson and CIA analyst Anne Jablonski revealed the agency had been involved with his mission to Iran. CIA managers said their own employees had lied to them, and assigned its internal security team to investigate. That inquiry quickly determined that the agency was responsible for Levinson while he was in Iran, according to a former official familiar with the review. In an email sent in mid-2006, Jablonski discusses the work arrangement between Levinson and the CIA. □



This undated handout photo provided by the family of Robert Levinson after they received it in April 2011, shows retired-FBI agent Robert Levinson.

(AP Photo/Levinson Family)

day. "We continue to be

focused on doing everything we can to bring Bob home safely to his family. This remains a top priority of the U.S. government." The chairman of the House Intelligence Committee said the U.S. believes Levinson is alive and is being held by the Quds Force, which is the special operations wing of Iran's Revolutionary Guard.

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White House to keep NSA, cyber oversight together

WASHINGTON (AP) — A

group reviewing the National Security Agency's surveillance programs and cyber command operations sent President Barack Obama more than 40 recommendations on intelligence collection and government spying. The White House did not make the task force's report public. Published reports Friday described the recommendations as limited in scope. The Review Group on Intelligence and Communications Technology held no public meetings and met several times with business and privacy groups out of

the range of the media and public.

DNI head James Clapper exempted the panel from standard federal requirements that it work transparently. The White House is reviewing the task force recommendations and finalizing its own internal study, National Security Council spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden said.

She said the process was expected to be finished in January, after which Obama would speak publicly on any changes to the government's intelligence gathering and surveillance. The review board report is

also expected to be made public after that point. Although the task force has kept its recommendations secret, news organizations have sketched out proposals that would allow most of the NSA's surveillance programs to continue but change ownership of the government's large inventory of telephone records and restrict spying on allied nations.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the panel proposed shifting control of sought-after phone records from the government to individual phone companies, while The New York Times said the panel urged

the White House to hold a tighter leash on U.S. spying on foreign leaders. The panel's recommendations come as skepticism over the NSA surveillance mounts in Congress and from technology companies and privacy groups. Worried that reports of foreign data intercepts could drive away international customers, lawyers for a consortium of tech companies including Google, Microsoft, Apple, Facebook and Yahoo recently urged legal changes in Congress. Their move coincided with a bipartisan legislative push to scale back the surveillance programs. □

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Union divided on whether to vote on Boeing

MIKE BAKER

Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Leaders in the International Association of Machinists publicly differed Friday on whether to bring Boeing's latest contract offer to a vote, exposing tensions within the union over how to handle the high-stakes negotiations.

National union spokesman Frank Larkin said Friday that officials were exploring the idea after hundreds of members demanded an opportunity to vote on the contract to secure work on the 777X airplane. Larkin said members have always had the final say and that they have every right to vote on the terms of the offer.

But local union officials said Friday they don't see any point in bringing it to a vote because it's too similar to a contract the union rejected a month ago.

"So, until Boeing changes its conditions, we don't have an offer to vote on," said District 751 President Tom Wroblewski in a statement.

A latest round of contract talks collapsed Thursday after local officials with the Machinists said they could not recommend Boeing's latest proposal to members. Local Machinists spokesman Bryan Corliss says Boeing has withdrawn the contract offer.

Boeing spokesman Doug Alder, however, said while negotiations have stalled, the contract offer is still on the table and in the union's hands.

Local union officials have seemed to disagree with their national leaders in recent weeks on how to handle Boeing's offers. That division was clear last month, when local union members voted to reject a contract negotiated by IAM leadership.

Boeing and the Machinists have been exploring a deal that would secure the production of the new 777X airplane in the Seattle area and the thousands of jobs that come with it. □

Northeast braces for weekend snow, sleet storm

STEPHEN SINGER

Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) -- A snow and ice storm headed for the Northeast is expected to slow weekend

travel by air, rail and highway and has utilities and airports on alert.

The National Weather Service said six to 12 inches of snow was expected from

Saturday to Sunday in most of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island. Areas north and west of New York City also could get eight

inches or more. And sleet and freezing rain were expected. A saltwater solution applied to roads before storms won't work now because temperatures are too low and the saltwater would freeze, said Kevin Nursick, spokesman at the Connecticut Department of Transportation.

However, crews have treated highways before recent snowfalls with salt, helping to keep snow from bonding. And the storm will not affect work day commutes. "The timing is pretty good coming on a weekend," Nursick said.

Not so for retailers, who have less than two weeks before Christmas to clear their shelves and face the prospect of losing critical weekend sales.

Kathy Grannis, a spokeswoman for the National Retail Federation, said consumers will likely shop online. And the weekend before Christmas gives re-

tailers and shoppers another opportunity after this weekend.

"If a big storm hits around 21st, 22nd, it will be a completely different story," Grannis said. Matthew Brelis, a spokesman for Boston's Logan Airport, expects the brunt of the storm Saturday night, but will evaluate conditions as forecasts change.

Caroline Pretymann, a spokeswoman for Northeast Utilities, which serves electric and gas customers in Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Hampshire, said extra crews would be available beginning overnight Saturday to respond to outages.

And Metro-North, which runs trains between New York City and suburban Connecticut, Long Island and New York's Hudson Valley, said on its website it may reduce or suspend service "depending on the severity of the weather." □



Snow falls near the Capitol Building in Washington, Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2013. A new storm headed for the Northeast is expected to slow weekend travel by air, rail and highway and has utilities and airports on alert.

(AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)



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Ukrainian president meets with opposition leaders

DAVID M. HERSZENHORN

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KIEV, Ukraine - In the his first meeting with opposition leaders since the outbreak of a sustained civil uprising here, President Viktor Yanukovich of Ukraine had a succinct message

levels of government. He urged them to stop protesting.

"I appeal to our citizens," Yanukovich said, at the end of a more than two-hour meeting that included protest organizers, religious leaders and all three

tion has never led to anything good."

The round-table talks occurred as Yanukovich, whose popularity has plummeted since his abrupt decision last month to back away from signing political and free trade accords with Europe, is under intensifying pressure to resolve the crisis. It is coming not only from officials in the West and in Russia, who have been in a tug of war for influence over Ukraine's future, but also from some of Ukraine's wealthiest and most influential businessmen - the oligarchs -who seem increasingly jarred by the instability and uncertainty in the country, and worried about the quickly deteriorating economy.

The country's richest man, Rinat Akhmetov, a multibillionaire widely viewed as an ally of Yanukovich's, issued a statement Friday expressing support for demonstrators and urging that the government offer a clearer picture of its intentions. It was a highly

unusual commentary on public affairs by a man who generally prefers to operate privately.

Since backing away from the accords with Europe, Yanukovich has been in negotiations with Moscow over desperately needed economic aid, and he is scheduled to meet Tuesday with Russia's president, Vladimir Putin. At the round-table meeting, one of the country's senior religious leaders, Patriarch Filaret of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate, warned Yanukovich not to use force against protesters or to join Putin's fledgling customs union of post-Soviet states. "Use of force only calls for more force," Filaret said, sitting directly across the table from Yanukovich, who at times alternatively seemed pained and bored throughout the meeting. "And what does that mean? A civil war. Do we want a civil war? None of us wants a civil war."

"It is impossible to disperse

the square by force," Filaret said. "It will gather again. And if you join the customs union, even more people will come out."

Although Yanukovich offered to impose a moratorium on the use of force against demonstrators and to consider amnesty for protesters who have been arrested in recent weeks, opposition leaders say they heard nothing conciliatory in his remarks.

"The only response there was today was that forceful methods will not be used now," said Arseniy P. Yatsenyuk, the leader in Parliament of the opposition Fatherland party, who attended the talks. "Do I believe this? No. But did he give his word? Yes."

Vitali Klitschko, the champion boxer who leads the United Democratic Alliance for Reform party, put it more bluntly. "Today, the authorities have not considered any of the oppositions' demands," Klitschko said. "This round table was for show." □



Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, facing camera far right, meets with opposition leaders in Kiev, Ukraine, Dec. 13, 2013. The sit-down, a first in four weeks of civil unrest over his government's withdrawal from closer political and economic ties with the European Union, included, facing away, from left: heavyweight boxing champion Vitali Klitschko, Oleh Tyagnibok, and Arseniy Yatsenyuk.

(Sergey Ponomarev/The New York Times)

Friday for the tens of thousands of protesters calling for changes at the highest

ex-presidents of Ukraine. "Calm down and stop the confrontation. Confronta-

Syria rebels: Islamic militants nabbed our weapons

CASSANDRA VINOGRAD

Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Islamic militants have taken control of a cache of machine guns and ammunition intended for Syria's Western-backed rebels, the Syrian opposition confirmed Friday, demanding that the

weapons be returned.

Syrian National Coalition official Monzer Akbik told reporters in London that it still wasn't completely clear how a new alliance of hardline Muslim fighters came to control warehouses containing rebel machine guns and ammu-

nition at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing between Syria and Turkey, but they did. "The reality is that the Islamic Front are holding, now, the hardware," he said. "They should return it." The apparent seizure of rebel weaponry by fighters loyal to Syria's newly creat-

ed Islamic Front has dealt a serious blow to the Syrian opposition, which is struggling to maintain international support as extremists expand their hold across rebel-held territories. The Islamic Front is an umbrella group of powerful ultra-conservative Muslim fighters.

The move has rattled supporters of the Syrian National Coalition — which opposes the rule of Syrian President Bashar Assad — and its military wing, the Free Syrian Army, the Western-backed rebel group fighting to topple him. On Wednesday, the U.S. and Britain both announced they were suspending deliveries of non-lethal gear to rebels in northern Syria following news of the warehouse takeover.

Akbik said Gen. Salim Idris, the Free Syrian Army commander, was in southern Turkey meeting with members of the Islamic Front to demand the return of the weapons.

There are conflicting sto-

ries over how the Islamic Front won control of the warehouses. The Islamic Front denies that it took the weapons by force, saying it was responding to a call for help from the Free Syrian Army after the group came under attack from unknown gunmen.

Akbik refused to give any details on what happened, saying the situation was "foggy," but said ammunition — mostly AK-47 bullets — and heavy machine guns were seized.

Despite the incident, Akbik said the opposition was still hoping to include Islamic fighters as part of their delegation to the Geneva peace talks in January, which aim to end the fighting that activists say has killed over 120,000 people in three years.

He said the opposition was "keen to form a delegation that will be as wide as possible" and that the Islamic Front was welcome to send a representative to the talks as part of the opposition delegation. □



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Iran halts expert-level talks over US sanctions

NASSER KARIMI
Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran pulled out of expert-level talks with six world powers Friday to protest the expansion of U.S. sanctions, saying the blacklisting of more entities violates the spirit of a groundbreaking agreement over Tehran's atomic program.

In the first major hurdle to the interim deal reached last month in Geneva, the United States targeted more than a dozen companies and people on Thursday for evading sanctions against Iran.

It was an effort by the Obama administration to show it will enforce existing law even as it presses Congress to hold off on additional measures while world powers pursue a comprehensive nuclear deal with Tehran. But the Iranians

called the move them "unconstructive and against good intentions," and accused the U.S. of sending

have had and it is against the spirit of the Geneva agreement," senior Iranian nuclear negotiator Abbas

and on the other hand they made a new move and the Treasury added new companies to the list."

The White House said the expansion did not violate the agreement and represented actions based on existing sanctions. Spokesman Jay Carney said President Barack Obama is committed to refraining from any new nuclear-related sanctions.

IRNA also quoted an unnamed official as saying an Iranian team of experts had halted technical talks with the six world powers in Vienna because of the U.S. sanctions on new Iranian entities.

"Iran has ended the talks because of the addition of more individuals and companies to the sanctions list. It was against the path of agreements," the official was quoted as saying.

The talks in Vienna are on the expert level, bringing representatives from the six powers and Iran together to discuss implementing parts of the Geneva deal. They started on Monday and were originally set for two days.

A diplomat in Vienna who is familiar with the talks confirmed that the Iranian delegation left for Tehran for consultations but said the Iranians had not directly linked Friday's departure to the U.S. moves. He demanded anonymity because he was not authorized to comment on the closed consultations.

Secretary of State John Kerry told reporters that the Vienna talks were making progress "but I think we're at a point in those talks where folks feel a need to consult and take a moment." □



Iran's Ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, IAEA, Reza Najafi speaks to the media before talks with the IAEA at the International Center in Vienna, Austria.

(AP Photo/Ronald Zak)

mixed signals.

"This is a game of double standards — it is not in accord with the talks we

Araghchi told the official news agency IRNA. "On the one hand they tried to halt sanctions in Congress,

Sister of fugitive mobster is arrested in Sicily, Italy

FRANCES D'EMILIO
Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Police searching for Italy's No. 1 Cosa Nostra fugitive arrested 30 people Friday in a pre-dawn sweep of his stronghold in Sicily, including his sister, whom prosecutors say was helping to transmit the Mafioso's orders and run extortion rackets during his years on the run.

The raids also arrested a nephew and a cousin of Matteo Messina Denaro, who has been at large since 1993. The 51-year-old Messina Denaro has been convicted in absentia of murder, Mafia association and other crimes, and investigators say he runs the Mafia's rackets in western Sicily.

The capture of other top Mafia bosses in the last few years has moved him to the No. 1 slot on Italy's most-wanted list of mobsters. "We have never come as close to Matteo Messina Denaro as today," Carabinieri commander Mario Parente told reporters in Palermo, Sicily's capital. The fugitive's sister, Patrizia Messina Denaro, looked

defiant as police put her into a car after arresting her at 3 a.m. Friday at her home in Castelvetro, a town in the crime clan's stronghold area of Sicily. Investigators said wire-tapped conversations between suspects revealed that she had been in contact with her fugitive brother and played a key role in transmitting his directives to other mobsters in the clan. The investigation showed that his "sister can carry out a role, traditionally held by males. But this doesn't mean that men weren't capable of taking Matteo Messina Denaro's place" at the helm of Cosa Nostra in western Sicily, Prosecutor Teresa Principato told reporters. She said others are suspected of helping Messina Denaro avoid capture, but that investigators decided not to arrest them now. Principato was suggesting investigators hope those people will inadvertently help lead police to the boss's hideout.

In his long years on the run, Principato said, Messina Denaro, hasn't strayed that far from his home base, al-

though he occasionally is believed to have gone abroad.

Police said in a statement

that his sister has played a key role in the clan's extortion racket. Investigators said extortion revenue has

been used for the fugitive's expenses while in hiding and to support families of jailed mobsters. □

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Egypt's security forces disperse Islamist protests

MARIAM
TONY G. GABRIEL
Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Egyptian security forces fired tear gas Friday to disperse

RIZK demand the release of detained student protesters. One person was killed south of the capital and another in the canal city of Suez.

backed military coup in July, his supporters have been staging near-daily protests calling for his reinstatement. Their numbers dwindled under a heavy

November. Demonstrators gathered on Friday despite heavy rains and unprecedented low temperatures to support dozens of students arrested by authorities in recent weeks. Some of them made a four-finger hand gesture used to remember the violent breakup of an Islamist sit-in by security forces in mid-August that left hundreds dead.

Clashes erupted as security forces fired volleys of tear gas to disperse the gatherings, with local residents also chasing protesters in the industrial city of Mahallah, north of Cairo. In Cairo's southern neighborhood of Maadi, demonstrators hurled Molotov cocktails at security forces who fired tear gas to disperse them. Protesters and local residents pelted each other with stones in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria.

In Suez, protesters set a police car ablaze before residents chased them away, a local security official said. A medical official said a young man was killed by a gunshot to the head in clashes between supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and anti-Islamist locals. Egypt's official news agency MENA said another person, 17-year-old Belal Yassin, was killed in clashes between pro-

testers and police in the city of Fayoum, south of Cairo.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not allowed to brief reporters. Meanwhile, the Minister of Interior, responsible for the police, visited the city of Ismailia, where a car bomb killed a soldier and wounded 18 people a day earlier.

Gen. Mohammed Ibrahim visited the wounded police and civilians, according to Egypt's state news agency, MENA. He said such "terror attacks" showed the attackers were desperate after a string of successful security raids.

There was confusion on the cause of the blast, with earlier reports claiming the explosives were planted in the ground. However Ismailia prosecutor said Friday it was a car bomb detonated by remote control.

Since Morsi's ouster, Egypt has been hit with a string of car bombs and suicide attacks, including a failed assassination attempt targeting the country's interior minister in September. In reaction, the military has pursued a broad offensive in the eastern Sinai Peninsula against suspected Islamic militants, largely blamed for the increasing attacks. □



Muslim Brotherhood lawmaker Saad el-Katatni, right, leader of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Mohammed Badie, center, and Mahmoud Abu Zaid, senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood, left, gesture during an appearance at a courtroom in Cairo, Egypt this week.

(AP Photo/Mohammed Abu Zaid)

hundreds of Islamist demonstrators march- ing across the country to Since Islamist President Mohammed Morsi was ousted in a popularly-

security crackdown, but university campuses have emerged at the forefront of the movement since classes started last September.

Protests organized mainly by Islamist students on and off campus have often deteriorated into clashes with security forces, leaving two dead in

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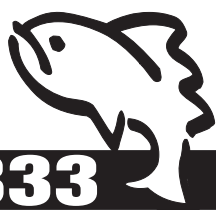
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Albania:

Bomb found under car near PM's office

LLAZAR SEMINI
Associated Press

TIRANA, Albania (AP) — Police in Albania Friday said they have found a bomb under the car of a senior official as it entered the compound of the office of Socialist Prime Minister Edi Rama.

Security officials called in bomb disposal officers, who found 200 grams (7 ounces) of C4 explosive, two detonators and a cell phone attached under the car of Besnik Dervishi, the Socialist regional governor of the southwestern Vlore district.

The device was removed

and destroyed in a nearby controlled blast, police said.

Rama was not at the office when the incident occurred. Police gave no other details, but said an investigation was underway and that additional security had been provided for Dervishi and members of his family.

Politics in once staunchly communist Albania has been marred by decades of volatile debate and violence, while public officials have also been targeted by criminal gangs.

In 2011, a judge was killed in Vlore when a bomb ex-

ploded under his moving car. There was no claim of responsibility for that attack and police made no arrests.

Rama took over as prime minister in September after a landslide win for the Socialists in June elections.

The incident sparked criticism from the conservative opposition, which hinted that the Socialists themselves could have been behind the bomb. They described it as a "spectacle designed to distract public attention from the premier's plans to raise taxes and put pressure on businesses." □

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Nicaragua in the grip of Ortega's canal dream

**LUIS GALEANO
M. WEISSENSTEIN
Associated Press
MANAGUA, Nicaragua**

(AP) — Six months after the Sandinista government granted a Chinese businessman a 100-year concession to build a vast canal across Nicaragua, most of the nation is in the thrall of the imagined waterway. In the capital, Nicaraguans snap photographs of the plaster Virgin Mary perched on an altar against the backdrop of a supertanker traversing the country's biggest lake. "Virgin Mary, bless the great trans-ocean canal!" declares the government-sponsored invocation behind her.

From boardrooms in the capital to hamlets where goods move by horse cart, Nicaraguans say they are confident the \$40 billion canal will become reality, lifting their country from poverty to prosperity. The national university system announced this summer that it will create majors in metallurgy and port management, as well as Chinese language classes, in service of the canal.

Warnings by legal and environmental experts that the waterway is economically unfeasible, ecologically risky and a bad deal for Nicaragua are virtually unheard in a country where President Daniel Ortega has consolidated control of every major state institution, as well as much of the media. Opposition charges that Ortega is conjuring a canal to win support for unlimited re-election are falling on deaf

ears.

"The inter-ocean canal will mean great growth for Nicaragua, for the president and for the people too," Daniel Ellis, 19, an architecture student from the

national airport.

The deal pays Nicaragua \$10 million a year for 10 years and gradually transfers ownership to Nicaragua, handing over 100 percent after a century.

thing."

"This is a worse deal than the original Panama Canal deal, which was not a good deal and not a deal that Panama voluntarily signed," Maurer said.

build these sub-projects," Wild said.

"The canal is his vision, there's no doubt of that if you talk to the guy."

Many legal and environmental experts charge that the canal deal violates national sovereignty, and construction could cause profound ecological damage to this rugged nation of lakes, cloud-wreathed volcanoes and thick tropical forest, by damming rivers, splitting ecosystems and moving untold tons of earth.

"It's basically handing over the whole country—water, air and land, without any studies," said Luis Callejas, an opposition congressman who was invited to join a 10-day trip to China sponsored by Wang in October for a group of prominent Nicaraguan businessmen and politicians.

After he announced he would present Wang with a letter decrying the secrecy and constitutional violations of the canal concession process, Callejas did not receive the promised visa to China, and the group left without him. A Sandinista lawmaker who abstained from voting in favor of the canal law was ejected from the party's congressional caucus days later.

Wild said the canal would improve Nicaragua's environment, in large part because large-scale reforestation would be needed to guarantee water to the canal.

"What we're going to do will be an absolute positive for the environment," he said. □



Oscar Torres, a 62-year-old retired construction worker takes photos of a banner showing a map of Nicaragua with possible routes of the Inter-Oceanic canal in Managua, Nicaragua.

(AP Photo/Esteban Felix)

Atlantic coast said as he posed by another government altar celebrating the waterway.

After three days of discussion in June, the National Assembly controlled by Ortega's Sandinista party approved giving Beijing-based telecommunications CEO Wang Jing a 50-year renewable concession to build a canal more than three times the length of the Panama Canal, as well as tax-free side projects including ports on Nicaragua's Pacific and Atlantic coasts, an oil pipeline bisecting the country, a cargo railway, two free-trade zones and an inter-

But the payments and the transfer only begin if and when the canal begins operation. Under the agreement, Wang can skip building the canal altogether but plow ahead with the other projects.

Critics fear this will leave Wang with a host of lucrative tax-free enterprises, and Nicaragua without the centerpiece of the deal or revenue from what actually gets built.

"This is an astounding giveaway," said Noel Maurer, a Harvard Business School expert on Latin American development. "It's just kind of like here's a bunch of privileges, go build some-

Manuel Coronel Kautz, a veteran Sandinista leader who manages Nicaragua's Great Inter-Oceanic Canal Authority, said the government was confident the canal would "generate an enormous number of jobs for an impoverished country."

Chief project adviser Bill Wild said Wang is spending large amounts of his own money to dispatch dozens of Chinese, Nicaraguan and Western experts around the country to conduct environmental and geological feasibility studies to be completed in coming months.

"He's not out there just to

Venezuelan inflation spoils Christmas tradition

VIVIAN SEQUERA

Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)

— Freshly greased plantain leaves, a kitchen splattered with corn meal, and festive music accompanied by generous amounts of alcohol all make up one of Venezuela's most-enduring Christmas traditions: the gathering of family to prepare a corn dough tamale known as the hallaca.

But this year, the icon of the Venezuelan kitchen is under threat from the nation's grinding economic crisis.

With inflation near a two-decade high of 54 percent, prices for many of the treat's trademark ingredients have skyrocketed beyond the reach of many family budgets. And just finding some of the fixings can be an ordeal, with everything from vegetable oil to beef hard to come by as government price controls discourage production and contribute to record levels of food shortages.

"It's very sad. I don't know yet if we'll be able to make any this year," Maria Elena Ortiz, 35, said as she hunted in a Caracas supermarket for the 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of corn flour she and her family need to make their annual batch of about 80 hallacas.

The return of the familiar tradition is for many a welcome respite from a rocky year marked by the death of President Hugo Chavez, a disputed election to succeed him and, more recently, the shuttering of businesses accused of waging economic war against the government. While tamales are common throughout Mexico, Central America and parts of South America, the Venezuelan variant stands out for its mixture of European, indigenous and African flavors that reflect the nation's multicultural roots. That and the role it plays bringing families together in sometimes two-day cooking marathons add an extra seasoning that can't be mass produced. The corn dough filling of

the hallaca is greased with annatto-colored cooking oil and topped with chicken and pork stew. Green olives, raisins and capers provide savory accents before the creation is wrapped in dried plantain leaves popular in African cuisine, tied in a rectangle

mas, slaves would collect food scraps left by plantation owners and use them to spice up their daily diet of cornmeal dough. In modern times, it's the matriarch of the family who usually supervises the extensive chopping of vegetables, pin-rolling of

across this 30 million-person country, as does the smoky smell of dried plantain leaves.

"It's a collective effort full of emotion that makes everyone believe that the best-tasting hallaca is the one my mom makes," said Federico Tischler, a Cara-

that they'll find the necessary ingredients, many of them imported, and that their wallets won't be emptied.

In what's become a common holiday practice in recent years, the government is organizing special food caravans to distribute ingredients at "fair" prices. It's also increased inspections of supermarkets to prevent retailers from charging "speculative" prices.

The Food Ministry insists that shoppers at state-run supermarkets need to spend no more than 13.19 bolivars per hallaca, or about \$2 at the official exchange rate, to make a typical batch of 50.

But shopping at such discount retailers can be trying: Lines are long, supplies are rationed and government-trained civilian militias patrol the aisles.

Meanwhile at private supermarkets, where the vast majority of Venezuelans shop, you'd need to spend nearly triple that amount to acquire all the ingredients. Ortiz said her family plans to continue the hallaca tradition, but the shortages and price hikes have drained much of the joy out of the season. "We have to run around all over Caracas to find the list of ingredients," she said. "This is a nightmare." □



A chef demonstrates how corn dough tamales known as hallacas are prepared, at a Christmas fair in a state-owned market in Caracas, Venezuela. The country's most-enduring Christmas traditions: the gathering of family to prepare hallacas, is under threat from the nation's grinding economic crisis. With inflation near a two-decade high of 54 percent, prices for many of the treat's trademark ingredients have skyrocketed beyond the reach of many family budgets.

(AP Photo/Fernando Llano)

and cooked in boiling water.

It's not clear how the hallaca came about. One popular version holds that it arose during colonial times when, around Christ-

the corn dough and slow-cooking of the chicken and pork stew that makes up the hallaca's stuffing. Gaita folk music that's popular around Christmas fills countless kitchens

cas-based chef who has delved deep into Venezuela's gastronomic history. So popular is the dish that President Nicolas Maduro is stepping up efforts to guarantee Venezuelans

Mexico readies oil opening amid challenges

E.

CASTILLO

K. CORCORAN

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) —

Mexico's sweeping away of seven decades of nationalist protections and letting foreign companies back into its oil fields is crucial to bringing the expertise and money needed to rejuvenate its sclerotic energy industry, supporters say.

But even after the strong approval given by both houses of Congress this week, skeptics ask whether Mexico has the ability or will to regulate the private contracts for the benefit of all Mexicans rather than just a few.

The final step for the energy package that passed

Congress on Thursday is approval by the legislatures of 17 of Mexico's 31 states, because of its changes to the Mexican constitution. Passage is widely seen as assured, even though the articles were once seen as sacred, a protection from foreigners plundering Mexico's patrimony.

Industry analysts and oil companies in the United States say both countries will benefit from the measure, which ends the monopoly of state-run Petroleos Mexicanos, or Pemex, and allows Mexico's government to contract with companies like Exxon Mobil and BP to explore and drill for oil and gas that Mexico hasn't been able to tap.

"It's a win-win if there ever was one," William Colton, Exxon Mobil's vice president of corporate strategic planning, said in a webcast. Mexican oil exports to the United States are projected to drop as U.S. production increases from new fields, but analysts say increased investment in the Mexican economy is good for everyone, and not just for energy.

"It will boost productivity, economic growth and job creation," President Enrique Pena Nieto, who pushed the plan, said via his Twitter account after Thursday's vote.

Mexico faces a daunting task in making Pemex more competitive and ef-

ficient. While it's a symbol of national pride and success, the company is widely seen as bloated, backward and corrupt.

Pemex's production is down 25 percent since 2004, and it's suffering record thefts of its oil, some by its own employees. The company is dominated by a labor union headed by the powerful and wealthy Carlos Romero Deschamps, whose family is famous for its ostentatious lifestyle. It produces double the oil of Norway's state-run Statoil, yet has 6.5 times as many employees, says Mexico's Center of Research for Development, or CIDAC for its initials in Spanish. □



At Diamonds International's Holiday Shopping evening, a true love story unfolds...



changing and romantic moment with them. The same evening Diamonds International also helped to bind the relationships of two other local couples who came to purchase Engagement Rings and Wedding Bands. Also two lucky ladies got an unexpected prize when Diamonds International gifted via a raffle two of their luxury pieces, congratulations to Mrs. Maria Grisi and Mrs. Jennifer Arends Reyes. B Diamonds International is now one of the largest jewelry retailers in the world. They have more locations in the Caribbean than any other fine jeweler, and a network that stretches from the company's New York City headquarters into Mexico, across the Caribbean and as far as Alaska. Diamonds International has extended an invite to all local Arubians to shop with them and enjoy the discounted prices for this holiday season. Located in downtown Oranjestad, at Port of Call open 9-7pm Monday through Friday and 9-6pm on Saturdays. □



as the gentleman took to one-knee and opened the box to the expectant gasps of the other diners, but no greater reaction than that of the bride-to-be who saw her dream-ring sparkling in the box. The diners cheered as the young lady accepted his romantic proposal, and agreed to become Mrs Nucete. Diamonds International sends a heartfelt congratulations to Miguel and Stephanie and thanks them for sharing this life-

ORANJESTAD - On December 5th Diamonds International together with invited guests, celebrated in an evening of holiday festivity and indulgent luxury-shopping. For the month of December, Diamonds International has invited all local residents to share in their employee discount, a phenomenal offer which has attracted many so

far to take advantage of these huge savings rarely seen on luxury items. The store was alive with holiday cheer as champagne flowed and Christmas presents were purchased for loved ones, however unknown to the shoppers, the evening would end with a beautiful love story. A young couples lives were soon to change after the young lady found the ring of her dreams waiting in the showcase. However as much as he professed his love for the young lady, the gentleman was unsure whether he still believed in marriage, after a long discussion they decided to leave without the ring, the girl left clearly a little heart-broken. Little did she know that the Christmas elves at Diamonds International had been secretly plotting with her groom-to-be,

before they left for dinner her beau had already purchased the ring and asked that Diamonds International deliver it to the restaurant where they would go for dinner that evening, the restaurant where they had shared their first date. The Diamonds International elves sneaked the ring to the groom and the rest of the diners paused





AHRA celebrates year end looking back at great accomplishments



PALM BEACH - Aruba Human Resources Association has known a year of getting back on track with new ventures and more exposure in the community. Our members can look back at innovative ideas and great sessions, including in January an explana-

tion of the changes in the labor laws by our member and friend Tito de Cuba. In February and March our member Ica Jones, who's a member of the John Maxwell Partner Circle, gave the 2 presentations, 'Develop a Positive Self Image,' and 'Failing Forward

to Success.' In April the Labor Department organized a new presentation on the new Labor Laws and AHRA members were invited. In June AHRA members were invited to the CANTO HR Forum, and then July 5th was our 20th Anniversary Celebration, which was done in style! We had a very nice celebration! Also in July we had in preparation for the elections a topic Strategic Planning and guidance on political issues at the workplace with our member Tito de Cuba. In August we took on a never-before challenge of having a Political Forum with the 3 major parties in government which were participating for the election for the new Gov-



ernment of Aruba and it was a great success. A Public Speaking seminar was held in September and was done by our former member Chantal Beke. Our last session was "Understanding your Constitution" with Mr. Milliard from the Universidad di Aruba. We surely enjoyed learning more of where it all started and what actually the constitution covers. And all that was done by this board in 2013, we would like to thank all the members who participated all year long in our meetings and programs, and also a special thanks to the contributors/speakers and of course the Board members. What do we have for 2014? A stronger year with more lectures and workshops. We are working forward to inviting the new Minister of Labor to introduce AHRA and hear from him what his

plans are, we are planning to attend the SHRM Conference with a group of AHRA members; next year it is in Orlando Florida. We also are planning to bring a special speaker from abroad whom we met at the CANTO HR Forum. We want to benchmark and do a conference together with the Curacao HR Association, and participate more in HR related changes in Law, etc by voicing our opinions via the right channels, and last but not least we will be bringing back the HR Awards: The HR Top Performer of the Year and the HR Professional of the Year. Other ideas that we want to put in the works: Revamp AHRA Website; AHRA Facebook Page; AHRA Newsletter; and our AHRA logo needs to be rejuvenated. AHRA wishes its members and the community of Aruba a blessed and safe Holiday Season. □



A Warm Bugaloe Welcome Back to Michael and Joyce Gearty!

PALM BEACH - Bugaloe Beach Bar & Grill's guests of the week are Michael and Joyce Gearty from Manchester, New Hampshire. These Aruba-lovers have been coming to Aruba for 14 years and just can't get enough of the fun and the sun! They discovered Bugaloe a few years ago and love spending their vacation at the bar having fun with the staff. Their funniest memory is having laughs with the crazy Bugaloe Crew and miss-matching the bartenders names after a few drinks! They are all just so much fun! After a sunny beach day, they like to enjoy some food and drinks at Bugaloe. Their favorite menu item is the Tuna Salad and with a few Mudslides or wines their day is complete. The Bugaloe crew would like to thank Michael and Joyce for being such loyal Bugaloe guests and hope to see them more often. □



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NFL Preview

Eagles take their snow offense indoors at Vikings

BARRY WILNER

AP Pro Football Writer

The Philadelphia Eagles can be assured of one warming thought as they head to Minneapolis to play the Vikings this weekend: There won't be 6 inches (16 centimeters) of snow on the field.

The game will be indoors. Not that Philadelphia would mind playing in inclement weather after its 34-20 victory over Detroit in blizzard-like conditions last Sunday. It seems odd, doesn't it, that the team at a disadvantage in wintry weather in this matchup hails from Minnesota.

"I don't think we need to take our rain gear," offensive coordinator Pat Shurmur said. No, as long as the Eagles bring LeSean McCoy, DeSean Jackson and Nick Foles on offense, operating behind that suddenly powerful line, they should be in good shape — in the Metrodome or on the tundra outside.

Continued on Page 21



Philadelphia Eagles' Riley Cooper, left, kicks up the snow as he pulls in a two-point conversion as Detroit Lions' Chris Houston defends during the second half of an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 8, 2013, in Philadelphia. Associated Press

Defending champions Perry, O'Hair share lead

NAPLES, Florida (AP) — Defending champions Kenny Perry and Sean O'Hair shot an 8-under 64 in modified alternate-shot play Friday for a share of the first-round lead in the Franklin Templeton Shootout.

The teams of Matt Kuchar-Harris English and Charles Howell III-Justin Leonard also shot 64 on the Ritz Carlton Resort's Tiburon course. The 24 teams will play better ball Saturday and finish with a scramble Sunday. After playing the front nine in 3 under, Perry and O'Hair birdied Nos. 13-16.

"It was a fun day for me," said Perry, the Champions Tour player of the year and Charles Schwab Cup

points champion. "When (O'Hair) poured it in from about 15 feet on the first hole I knew it was going to be a good day for us. We were never in any trouble. "We had a great chance to really go low today and better than 8 under, but that's OK. I mean, alternate shot is a tough format. To me it's my favorite format. I love it more than any format of all the three. So, you know, you can lose it. If we get off to a crummy start it's hard to catch up with best ball and scramble coming up."

Kuchar and English birdied Nos. 12-14 and eagled No. 17.

"Yeah, it was a lot of fun

playing with Harris," Kuchar said. "I knew he was on some pretty good form and knew I had a good horse for a partner."

English replaced the injured Brandt Snedeker in the field.

"This is a tournament that I've always watched on TV growing up and it seemed like such a great format and such a good competition," English said.

English hit a 6-iron shot from 192 yards to 6 feet to set up the eagle.

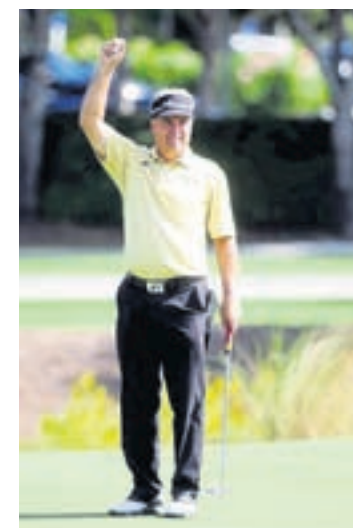
"When you start hitting some good shots and start getting some momentum, you keep rolling and we did a good job of keeping that momentum going on

the back nine and making a bunch of birdies and making eagle on 17," English said.

Howell and Leonard birdied the final three holes on the front nine and added birdies at Nos. 10, 12, 13, 17 and 18.

"Today we chose Justin to hit first and that was great for me because he drove it in the fairway every time and I could swing away at it," Howell said.

Retief Goosen and Fredrik Jacobson shot 67, and Jason Dufner and Dustin Johnson matched Chris DiMarco and Billy Horschel at 68. Tournament host Norman and Jonas Blixt had a 72. □



United States' Kenny Perry of Franklin, Ky., reacts to another group member sinking a putt on the 11th green Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2013, during play a practice round at Tiburon Golf Club in Naples, Fla. Wednesday marked the first day of the Franklin Templeton Shootout. Associated Press

Columbus scores 3 in first, top Rangers

The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Matt Calvert, Artem Anisimov and David Savard scored in the first 11:10, and the Columbus Blue Jackets beat the Rangers 4-2 on Thursday night, sending New York to its fourth straight loss. NHL Capsules

The Rangers, 0-3-1 on its nine-game homestand, closed within 3-2 in the third period, but Ryan Johansen pushed Columbus' lead back to two goals with 1:32 left.

The Blue Jackets goalie tandem of Curtis McElhinney and Mike McKenna, who are subbing for injured reigning Vezina Trophy winner Sergei Bobrovsky, stopped 32 of 34 shots.

Columbus (14-15-3) has won two in a row.

Dominic Moore and defenseman Dan Girardi scored for New York (15-16-1). Henrik Lundqvist was pulled after he stopped only 10 of 13 shots in the first period.

Cam Talbot relieved and made 13 saves the rest of the way, allowing only Johansen's goal between his pads.

FLYERS 2, CANADIENS 1 PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Michael Raffl and Claude Giroux scored goals, Steve Mason made 20 saves, and Philadelphia edged Montreal.

Jakub Voracek had two assists, and Giroux also had an assist to help the Flyers snap a three-game losing streak and extend their home winning streak to six games. They were coming off a 2-3-1 trip in which they finished up 0-2-1.

Mason shut the Canadiens out for 59 minutes before Alex Galchenyuk scored with 55.1 seconds left to cut it to 2-1.

The Canadiens have lost two in a row after going 9-0-1. They followed a 6-0 loss at home to the Los Angeles Kings on Tuesday with

another offensive clunker.

SENATORS 2, SABRES 1 OTTAWA, Ontario (AP) — Craig Anderson stopped 40 shots in Ottawa's win over Buffalo.

Bobby Ryan and Zack Smith scored for the Senators (13-14-6), who have earned at least a point in four straight games.

Tyler Ennis scored the lone goal for the Sabres (7-23-2), and Ryan Miller made 30 saves. This was the second of back-to-back games between the teams. Buffalo earned a 2-1 shootout victory on Tuesday.

LIGHTNING 2, RED WINGS 1, SO

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Martin St. Louis scored in the sixth round of the shootout, and Tampa Bay beat Detroit.

St. Louis netted the lone shootout goal when he beat Jonas Gustavsson to the stick side. Detroit, which has lost all six of its shootouts this season, failed this time against Ben Bishop.

Nikita Kucherov scored for the Lightning in regulation. Kyle Quincey had the Red Wings' only goal of the night.

Quincey put the Red Wings up 1-0 with his first goal in 51 games at 15:04 of the first. The defenseman also snapped a 16-game point drought.

Kucherov tied it with 43.7 seconds remaining in the second.

BLUES 6, MAPLE LEAFS 3

ST. LOUIS (AP) — David Backes scored twice and Jaden Schwartz added a goal and two assists to lead St. Louis over Toronto.

St. Louis has won eight of 11 overall. At 13-2-2, the Blues are tied with Boston, Pittsburgh and Minnesota for most home-ice wins.

Toronto lost its third in a row. Alexander Steen, Derek Roy and Chris Stewart scored for St. Louis, which has points in its last six games against Toronto. The teams met for the first



New York Rangers' goalie Henrik Lundqvist (30), of Sweden, looks on as a shot from Columbus Blue Jackets' Matt Calvert (11) gets by him during the first period of an NHL hockey game on Thursday, Dec. 12, 2013, in New York. The Blue Jackets won 4-2.

Associated Press

time since Nov. 10, 2011. Nazem Kadri, Nikolai Kulemin and James van Riemsdyk scored for the Maple Leafs, who got two goals in the final 5½ minutes. Brian Elliott, appearing in his third successive game, made 19 saves to improve to 6-1-1. Steen scored his 22nd goal, second in the NHL to Washington's Alex Ovechkin, who has 26.

PREDATORS 3, STARS 1 NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — David Legwand had a goal and an assist to lead Nashville past Dallas. Patric Hornqvist and Paul Gaustad also scored for Nashville, which has won two straight. Carter Hutton made 33 saves and improved to 6-3-1 in his second straight start. Erik Cole had the only goal for Dallas, which has lost

three of four. Nashville closed the first period with power-play goals from Hornqvist and Legwand just 28 seconds apart. **AVALANCHE 4, JETS 3, SO WINNIPEG, Manitoba (AP)** — Matt Duchene and P.A. Parenteau scored in the shootout, and Colorado stopped a two-game losing skid by beating Winnipeg. □

FIFA pledges \$1 million typhoon aid for Philippines

MANILA, Philippines (AP)

— The Philippine Football Federation says FIFA has offered up to \$1 million in funding to repair football projects damaged by Typhoon Haiyan.

The federation says FIFA pledged the money this week after approving grants in meetings held on the sidelines of the World Cup draw in Brazil.

FIFA President Sepp Blatter said after the typhoon struck last month that "we are at your disposal if special assistance is needed for the football family." Philippine football officials



Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, left, and FIFA President Joseph Blatter applaud during the draw ceremony for the 2014 soccer World Cup in Costa do Sauipe near Salvador, Brazil, Friday, Dec. 6, 2013.

Associated Press

will send FIFA details in the coming weeks of projects that need financial support. □

Aldridge stars as Blazers beat Rockets 111-104

The Associated Press

PORTLAND, Oregon (AP)

— Portland's LaMarcus Aldridge put in a superb individual performance, scoring 31 points and having a career-high 25 rebounds, to power the Western Conference-leading Trail Blazers to a 111-104 win over Houston on Thursday, NBA Roundup Portland, which also got 16 points and 10 rebounds from Robin Lopez, led by 10 points early in the fourth quarter, but Houston closed that to two with 4:45 to go. Nicolas Batum's 3-pointer pushed Portland's lead to 102-95 before Wesley Matthews' layup and free throw made it 108-96 with 2:04 left and effectively ended the contest. Dwight Howard had 32 points and 17 rebounds for the Rockets, who five weeks ago inflicted on of only two home defeats suffered this season by the



Houston Rockets' Terrence Jones, left, defends against Portland Trail Blazers' LaMarcus Aldridge, center, during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Portland, Ore., Thursday Dec. 12, 2013. Associated Press

Blazers.

Rockets coach Kevin McHale was not with the team because of the death of his mother, with assistant Kelvin Sampson filling in.

Houston guard Jeremy Lin returned after missing the previous six games with a sprained right knee.

In the day's other game, Brooklyn beat the Los Angeles Clippers to give Paul Pierce and Kevin Garnett a victory over their old Boston coach Doc Rivers.

Brooklyn's Andray Blatche and Joe Johnson each scored 21 points in the Nets' 102-93 victory over the Clippers.

Brook Lopez had 16 points for the Nets, who won their season-high third straight.

Chris Paul scored 20 points but had just two assists. It was the first time this season the Clippers had lost when he had scored at least 20 points. □

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NFL Roundup

Chargers stun Broncos 27-20
to open up AFC race

EDDIE PELLIS

AP National Writer

DENVER (AP) — The Denver Broncos' seemingly easy road to the AFC West title and top seeding in the American Conference took an unexpected jolt on Thursday with a 27-20 home loss to the San Diego Chargers. San Diego quarterback Philip Rivers threw two touchdown passes to Keenan Allen and kept the Chargers' offense on the field for nearly 39 minutes to produce a surprising result.

Denver is now 11-3; the same number of losses as American Conference rivals New England and Kansas City. Denver owns the tiebreaker against the latter but not the former. The Broncos' next two games are against strugglers Houston and Oak-

land so they still stand a strong chance of securing the top seeding, but Thursday's home loss against a mediocre team means anything now seems possible.

Disorganized on defense and never able to crank things up on offense, the Broncos gained only 13 yards on the 13 plays after taking a 10-3 lead late in the first quarter. That covered four fruitless drives during which they picked up just one first down.

"The longer you keep the ball and the less he has it, the better off you're going to be," said Chargers coach Mike McCoy in reference to Denver quarterback Peyton Manning. Rivers finished 12 for 20 on passing for 166 yards while Chargers running back Ryan Matthews matched his season high with 127

yards on 29 carries.

After Denver's long dry spell on offense, San Diego had taken a 24-10 lead, and though the Broncos (11-3) had overcome double-digit deficits four times this season to win, it didn't happen this time.

They got back within seven points and Manning had the ball on the Denver 3-yard line with 5:50 left. He moved the Broncos 30 yards in two plays with the help of a penalty. But the Chargers' maligned defense produced some pass rush and forced a bad throw, which linebacker Thomas Keiser picked off at the Denver 33.

The Chargers (7-7) got a field goal to go up by 10. Denver answered with a field goal but couldn't recover the onside kick



San Diego Chargers wide receiver Keenan Allen (13) leaps over Denver Broncos cornerback Kayvon Webster (36) on his way to the end zone for a touchdown in the second quarter of an NFL football game, Thursday, Dec. 12, 2013, in Denver.

Associated Press

and the Broncos lost to an AFC West foe for the first time in 11 games.

Manning's final numbers seemed decent — 27 for 41 for 289 yards and two touchdowns — but pad-

ded during desperation time.

It was Denver's first regular-season defeat at home in 14 games, dating to last September against Houston. □

NFL Preview

Continued from Page 18

"They've put up some numbers on snow," Vikings coach Leslie Frazier said, noting McCoy's franchise-record 217 yards rushing against the Lions. "For a back to be able to run like that against Detroit, they have a pretty good front, it's pretty impressive. Now you get him on a fast track, you wonder is that a good thing or a bad thing? We'll have to find a way to slow him down."

Minnesota's own star running back, Adrian Peterson, the 2012 league MVP, has a sprained right foot. Peterson says he's planning to play, but the Vikings will be cautious about using him with their elimination last week from playoff contention. The Vikings, who have won only three of 13 games, have an even bigger challenge if he can't go against the ever-improving Philly defense.

The Eagles, at 8-5, have won five of their last six against Minnesota and they are 5-1 on the road. They've also won their last five outings to move to the top of the NFC East. Cincinnati Bengals linebacker James Harrison returns to Pittsburgh, where he helped the Steelers win two Super Bowls. He's a part-time player now on a defense that is one of the NFL's most aggressive.

Steelers defensive coordinator Dick LeBeau said Harrison deserves cheers when he enters Heinz Field. "I know what he'll get from me," LeBeau said. "He's one of the great Steeler defenders. I'm not going to wish him success in the game, but I do love the man."

Cincinnati can clinch the AFC North with a win and a Baltimore loss to Detroit. The Bengals also earn a third straight playoff berth with a win and Miami losing to New England. The Steelers have lost two straight and would be



Minnesota Vikings running back Adrian Peterson lies on the field after injuring himself on a play in the first half of an NFL football game against the Baltimore Ravens, Sunday, Dec. 8, 2013, in Baltimore.

Associated Press

eliminated from playoff contention with a loss and a win by either Miami or Baltimore.

Baltimore, heading to Detroit on Monday, controls the AFC's second wild card and has won a season-high three straight, all at home. But the Ravens have lost three straight on the road and five of six this season.

The Lions have lost three of four, blowing fourth-quarter leads in each game.

The offense has not scored in the fourth quarter of Detroit's last three defeats. New England never seems to run out of miracles, and with a win in Miami will have the top seed in the AFC while clinching the East for a fifth successive season. The Patriots have beaten the Dolphins seven consecutive times, including three wins in Miami. Only eight current Miami players have beaten New England while wear-

ing a Dolphins uniform.

Quarterback Ryan Tannehill has been sacked 47 times, an NFL high and a Dolphins record. But they have won three of their last four.

Week 15 began with an upset as visiting San Diego handled Denver 27-20. Philip Rivers threw for two scores to rookie Keenan Allen and kept the Chargers' offense on the field for nearly 39 minutes.

Stuck on the sideline for most of the night, Peyton Manning ended up with 289 yards and only two touchdowns. The Broncos fell at home in the regular season for the first time in 14 games.

Also on Sunday, it's Green Bay at Dallas, Kansas City at Oakland, New York Jets at Carolina, New Orleans at St. Louis, Seattle at New York Giants, San Francisco at Tampa Bay, Chicago at Cleveland, Arizona at Tennessee, Washington at Atlanta, Houston at Indianapolis, and Buffalo at Jacksonville. □

Broner set for 1st defense of welterweight title

RAUL DOMINGUEZ

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO (AP) —

Adrien Broner has been eating lots of ice cream, admiring himself on television, and spending some quality time with friends and family.

Oh, and he's been preparing for the first defense of his WBA welterweight championship.

Broner faces former WBA junior welterweight champion Marcos Maidana on Saturday at the Alamodome.

If it seems like Broner is treating Maidana like an afterthought, he is — at least publicly.

"I'm undefeated, 27-0, 22 knockouts, three-time world champion in three different weight classes; I did that at 23," Broner said.

"At 24, I will be a four-time world champion in four different weight classes. We've just got to get this stepping stone out of the way."

Broner is rated as the sixth best pound-for-pound



In this Feb. 16, 2013 file photo, Adrien Broner celebrates after beating Gavin Rees of Britain in their WBC lightweight title match in Atlantic City, N.J.

Associated Press

fighter by Ring magazine. His speed, power, counter-punching and flamboyancy have drawn comparisons to his mentor, Floyd Mayweather, and led to a meteoric rise after only five years as a pro.

According to Broner, Maidana has as much chance of beating him as he does of getting the last word in.

"I really ain't got too much to say about my opponent," Broner said. "We're here to talk about Adrien Broner."

The dismissal is fine with Maidana, who held his right hand like a cocked gun that he pointed at Broner's head during the final press conference on Thursday.

"Everyone knows that Broner has a big mouth," Maidana said earlier in training camp. "But that doesn't bother me, because his mouth can't fight for him. Whether he has the guts to stand in front of me or if he runs, I'll definitely go for the KO and either way, I'm leaving the ring with the belt."

While Broner said he has eaten more ice cream preparing for this fight than in any training camp, he did let his guard down away from the glut of television cameras he revels in.

"I'm not going to lie, this is the biggest fight of my career," he said. "(Maidana's) going to try to come fight me; he's going to try to break my neck, so I'm ready, man, I'm focused."

The American is realistic because he knows every fighter has a "puncher's chance," and the aggressive Maidana is definitely a puncher.

After losing two of four matches, the Argentine has won his last three bouts by KO or TKO to earn this title match.

In his previous bout, Maidana landed 56 percent of his power punches in beating Josesito Lopez via a sixth-round TKO on June 8. After sending Lopez to the canvas with an overhand right, he followed with a crushing right uppercut that forced a stoppage. □

Cano: 'No respect from Yankees over new contract'

TIM BOOTH

AP Sports Writer

SEATTLE (AP) —

Robinson Cano seemed to be next in line as the player to wear New York Yankees pin-stripes for his entire career, all set to follow the path laid before him by mentors named Jeter, Posada and Rivera.

And then the Seattle Mariners blew him away with an offer of financial and career security the Yankees never came close to matching.

"I was looking for a contract where I would just be able to play and focus on the game and wouldn't wonder when I'm 37, 38 would I have a job one day. Would I be able to play?" Cano said. "The one thing in Seattle is I get the chance. Am I going to keep working hard? Yes.

Even harder? Yes. I'm going to do my best and play the same way I was playing in New York and go out there and do my business and win games."

Cano never stopped smiling late Thursday as he was introduced as the Mariners' new All-Star second baseman. He had \$240 million reasons to grin after signing a deal that tied for the fourth largest in Major League Baseball history. He has security for the next 10 years knowing that at age 31, he'll likely never go through the process of needing to seek another contract.

With music mogul Jay Z watching from the side of the room, his first client with Roc Nation Sports inked the fifth deal in MLB history to top the \$200 million mark. "Today isn't about me. It's

about him," Jay Z said as he declined interview requests.

Cano and his negotiating team spoke glowingly of working with the Mariners and Seattle general manager Jack Zduriencik. But Cano felt the Yankees lacked in their efforts to keep him.

Asked if he ever thought he'd leave New York, Cano said, "Honestly, no." Later, Cano said he never felt the Yankees wanted him back. "I didn't feel respect. I didn't get respect from them and I didn't see any effort," Cano said.

The Yankees' top offer was \$175 million over seven years. Cano said he didn't want to go through the contract process in his mid-to-late 30s. Seattle's willingness to push the contract out to 10 years — and the



Robinson Cano talks to reporters after he was introduced as the newest member of the Seattle Mariners baseball team on Thursday, Dec. 12, 2013, in Seattle.

Associated Press

whopping monetary commitment — sealed the agreement.

Cano was New York's most feared hitter for the past several years, and the loss of a middle infielder who bats .300 and hits 30 homers stings. Cano posted a .899 on-base plus slugging percentage last season and finished fifth in American League MVP voting.

Only the two deals signed by Alex Rodriguez — first with Texas and then the Yankees — and Joey Votto's contract with Cincinnati were worth more. Albert Pujols also signed a \$240 million deal with the Los Angeles Angels. Cano will make \$24 million per season from 2014-23 and the contract includes bonuses for awards. □

Agencies differ on allowing in-flight phone calls

SCOTT MAYEROWITZ

AP Airlines Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Just because it is safe to use cellphones on a plane, it does not mean that passengers should call just to say hello.

That argument played out across Washington Thursday as one U.S. government agency voted to remove its prohibition of in-flight calls while another considered its own ban.

The Federal Communications Commission voted 3-2 to start a months-long public comment process to remove its restriction.

"There is a need to recognize that there is a new technology," said FCC chairman Thomas Wheeler. "This is a technical rule. It is a rule about technology. It is not a rule of usage."

But the Department of Transportation, which oversees aviation, is not so sure that permitting calls "is fair to consumers."

"Over the past few weeks, we have heard of concerns raised by airlines, travelers, flight attendants, members of Congress and others who are all troubled over the idea of passengers talking on cell phones in flight — and I am concerned about this possibility as well," DOT Secretary Anthony Foxx said in a statement.

The DOT will consider its own ban as part of its consumer protection role.

Calls during flights have

been prohibited for 22 years over fears that they would interfere with cellular networks on the ground. Technological advances have resolved those concerns, which is one reason Wheeler wants to repeal the rule. He also wants the airlines, not the government, to have final

a House subcommittee Thursday morning.

The FCC proposal comes just weeks after the Federal Aviation Administration lifted its ban on using personal electronic devices such as iPads and Kindles below 10,000 feet, saying they don't interfere with cockpit instruments.

Among those who fly, opposition is stronger. Looking just at Americans who have taken more than one flight in the past year, 59 percent are against allowing calls on planes. That number grows to 78 percent among those who've taken four or more flights.

ban in place. American Airlines, United Airlines and JetBlue Airways all plan to study the issue and listen to feedback from passengers and crew.

Most Middle East airlines and a few in Asia and Europe already allow voice calls on planes. Others allow texting.

Southwest Airlines on Wednesday started allowing passengers — for \$2 a day — to use iPhones to send and receive text messages while on board through a satellite connection. The system will expand to Android phones early next year.

The nation's largest flight attendant union opposes allowing voice calls, saying cellphone use could lead to fights between passengers.

The Telecommunications Industry Association, the cell phone providers' trade and lobbying group, supports the change. The association notes that in countries that allow phone use, calls typically last one to two minutes and only a handful of people make them at the same time. Additionally, many of the calls involve checking voicemail, with no speaking by the passenger.

In both the House and the Senate lawmakers have introduced legislation ahead of the FCC meeting that would ban fliers from talking on cell phones midflight. □



Federal Communications Commission Chairman Tom Wheeler, left, testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington, Thursday, Dec. 12, 2013, before the House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing on cell phones on planes. Wheeler is joined at the witness table with FCC Commissioners from second from left, Mignon Clyburn, Jessica Rosenworcel, Ajit Pai, and Michael O'Rielly.

say on in-flight calling. But even Wheeler acknowledged the potential annoyance factor.

"I'm the last person in the world who wants to listen to somebody talking" while flying across the country, Wheeler told

An Associated Press-GfK poll released Wednesday found that 48 percent of Americans oppose allowing cellphones to be used for voice calls while flying; just 19 percent support it. Another 30 percent are neutral.

Delta Air Lines is the only airline to explicitly state that it won't allow voice calls regardless of what the government allows. Delta says years of feedback from customers show "the overwhelming sentiment" is to keep the

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US stocks mixed after 3-day downturn

JOSHUA FREED
AP Business Writer

The rally that has driven stocks to record highs paused this week as investors tried to figure out where things are headed next. Stocks were mixed on Friday and posted their second weekly loss in a row. Indexes reached record highs as recently as Mon-

Federal Reserve will decide next week to reduce its economic stimulus, which has boosted stock prices. "It's a hiatus," said Frank Fantozzi, CEO of money management firm Planned Financial Services. "I really think there's nothing economically wrong." Fantozzi noted that other bull markets have run for

1,775.32. The Nasdaq composite rose 2.57 points, or 0.06 percent, to 4,000.98. All three indexes fell for the week despite strong reports on employment, housing, and retail spending. Investors have been worried that the stronger the Fed thinks the economy is, the more likely it is to stop buying \$85 billion per month in bonds.

making committee meets next week and will announce any decisions on Wednesday.

Guessing when the stimulus will end has become a parlor game for investors. They are stuck between betting that it will end soon, meaning stocks could decline, versus betting that it will continue, bringing the bull market along with it.

Scott L. Wren, a senior equity strategist at Wells Fargo Advisors, believes the Fed will telegraph its intentions well in advance. Since they haven't done that yet, it suggests they won't act until the spring, he said. He also thinks the Fed could reduce its stimulus very slowly, easing the pain for financial markets.

Half of the 10 industry groups in the S&P 500 rose, led by consumer discretionary stocks. Stocks with declines included energy and technology stocks, as Apple, Google, and Microsoft all dipped.

December is shaping up to be a poor month for the stock market. The Dow, S&P and Nasdaq are all down. If they finish December lower, it would be the first monthly decline since August and only the third down month for the year.

Anadarko Petroleum fell \$5.37, or 6 percent, to \$78.30 after a federal bankruptcy judge said the company may be liable for between \$5 billion and more than \$14 billion in a legal battle over the spinoff of a paint materials company. The ruling isn't final.



Trader Richard DeViccaro works on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. World stock markets were tentative Friday Dec. 13, 2013 as investors prepared for the U.S. Federal Reserve's decision next week on whether to reduce its monetary stimulus.

(AP Photo/Richard Drew)

day, but then declined. How come? Investors may be nervous that stocks are overpriced, that stock prices have grown faster than justified by profits. They may be worried about conflict with Iran, or the debate over federal spending. Some are worried the

seven or eight years and peaked with higher prices compared to profits than what we're seeing now. The Dow Jones industrial average rose 15.93 points, or 0.1 percent, to close at 15,755.36. The Standard & Poor's 500 index fell 0.18 points, or 0.01 percent, to

The purchases have been aimed at keeping interest rates low, which makes it cheaper to borrow.

That has sent investors into stocks as they seek higher returns. The big indexes are up 20 percent or more this year.

The central bank's policy-

Corn sinks as traders expect higher crop estimate

The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Corn prices fell Friday as traders expect the government raise its crop production estimate next month.

Corn futures were also falling after China held up some U.S. corn shipments after saying unapproved genetic strains were found. Traders were also worried about preliminary moves in the Senate to attempt to eliminate the mandate to use ethanol in fuels.

"The situation is so bad for

corn, it's hard to pick one reason," said Todd Hultman, a grain analyst with DTN/The Progressive Farmer in Omaha, Nebraska.

The actively traded March contract for corn slumped 8.75 cents, or 2 percent, to settle at \$4.255 a bushel Friday.

Wheat fell slightly, and soybean futures edged higher. March wheat fell five cents, or 0.8 percent, to \$6.2875 a bushel, while January soybeans edged up 3.75 cents, or 0.3 percent, to

\$13.275 a bushel.

Energy contracts fell broadly. Benchmark U.S. crude oil for January delivery fell 90 cents, or 0.1 percent, to \$96.60 a barrel.

Wholesale gasoline fell half a penny to \$2.63 a gallon, heating oil fell nearly half a penny to \$2.98 a barrel and natural gas edged down 6 cents to \$4.351 per 1,000 cubic feet.

Metals prices were mixed. Gold rose \$9.70, or 0.8 percent, to \$1,234.60 an ounce.

Silver and copper also edged higher, but platinum and palladium futures fell slightly.

March silver rose 15.1 cents, or 0.8 percent, to \$19.604 an ounce and copper for delivery in the same month was up 1.7 cents, or 0.5 percent, at \$3.312 a pound.

January platinum fell \$1.50, or 0.1 percent, to \$1,362.90 an ounce and palladium for March delivery fell \$4.05, or 0.6 percent, to \$716.20 an ounce.

Plans scrapped for 'EuroVegas' resort in Spain

HAROLD HECKLE
Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Casino operator Las Vegas Sands on Friday scrapped plans to build a "EuroVegas" resort near Madrid after the Spanish government rejected as illegal concessions demanded for the investment.

The company, led by 80-year-old American tycoon Sheldon Adelson, had proposed a 22 billion-euro (\$30 billion) project that was to include 12 hotels, six casinos, a convention center, golf courses, theaters, shopping malls, bars and restaurants.

The government in Spain, where unemployment stands at 26 percent, had hoped it might create some 260,000 jobs, especially among the young, where unemployment is around 50 percent.

But the plan had been fiercely opposed by many who feared the resort would lead to a change in non-smoking laws, promote prostitution and provide only low-paying jobs. Negotiations over the terms of the deal hit a wall and Las Vegas Sands Corp. on Friday pulled the plug on the project. It said in a statement that the project was not in line with its immediate development plans, which will be focused on its Asian business. Spain's Deputy Prime Minister, Soraya Saenz de Santamaria, said the company had made late demands for legal and financial guarantees that "did not comply with Spanish law or that of the European Union."

She said the demands included tax benefits, financial compensation in the event of any future law change that could affect the project, and an assurance that new operators would be not be allowed in the sector.

Initially, Adelson had also assessed Barcelona, on the Mediterranean coast, as a possible location for EuroVegas before opting for Madrid.

Feeble construction hiring is a stubborn drag on growth

FLOYD NORRIS

© 2013 New York Times

Six years after the Great Recession began at the end of 2007, the United States still has fewer jobs than it did then.

That would not be the case but for the unprecedented collapse - and slow recovery - of the construction industry. Outside construction, there were 130,914,000 jobs in the United States in November, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, up 334,000, or 0.3 percent, from the prerecession peak.

But construction employment, which peaked at 7,476,000 in the spring of 2006, was down 30 percent, to 5,435,000, by the time it hit bottom in January 2011. Since then, only a fifth of the jobs lost have been recovered, and construction employment stands at 5,851,000.

During the decline, construction's share of total employment fell from 5.6 percent - the highest since 1959 - to a low of 4.2 percent. That was the lowest figure recorded since World War II. It has since edged back to 4.3 percent.

As a result, the economy now has 1,291,000 fewer jobs than it did at the peak, in January 2008. With employment gains averaging nearly 200,000 a month over the past year, that implies that the number of jobs in the economy is likely to exceed the old record in June - almost 6 1/2 years later. Before this, it never took as much as four years for the number of jobs to return to the previous peak, at least since the job figures began to be collected in 1939.

Construction hiring has not always been a leader in bringing the country out of recession, although it played that role in the mid-1980s. But it had never been such a continuing drag as it has been in the current cycle.

There has been some recovery in building, but from very low levels. The latest available figures show that construction

began on 604,000 single-family homes in the most recent 12 months. That is only a few thousand more than the low reached during the 1981-83 recession, when sky-high interest rates meant that few could afford to buy homes.

The three longest and most severe slides in construction employment since 1960, before the current one, ended with employment in the field down 15 to 18 percent. In each case, construction employment had fully recovered well before this much time had passed. But now, more than seven years after the peak, construction employment is still 24 percent below peak levels.

As a result, construction continues to be a drag on economic growth and employment. Before the crisis, construction - both residential and nonresidential - accounted for 9.4 percent of the nation's gross domestic product, the highest proportion in nearly 30 years. It plunged to half that level in 2011 and has now recovered only to 6 percent. It was never that low before the Great Recession, at least since 1947,

when the figures began to be calculated.

With construction employment remaining low, and with a lot of government infrastructure work needing to be done, including repairing decaying bridges

and building new schools, there would seem to be an obvious match that could get needed projects done for less than it would have cost a few years ago. Such work would also lift the economy by putting un-

employed people to work. But politically that seems to be impossible in the current atmosphere. As a result, there is no indication that the construction industry will stop being a drag on growth anytime soon. □



Will Hostetter, a carpenter with Larry Block Builders, carries trim downstairs at a new home under construction, in Pepper Pike, Ohio. Six years after the Great Recession began at the end of 2007, the United States still has fewer jobs than it did then. That would not be the case but for the unprecedented collapse - and slow recovery - of the construction industry.

(AP Photo/Tony Dejak)

US wholesale costs fall for third month

JOSH BOAK

AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S.

wholesale prices dropped in November for the third consecutive month, pushed down again by cheaper gasoline and lower home heating oil costs. But excluding volatile energy costs, inflation was mostly stable.

The producer price index, which measures prices before they reach the consumer, declined 0.1 percent last month, the Labor Department said Friday. This comes after similar decreases in October and September.

Overall wholesale prices have risen just 0.7 percent in the past 12 months.

Excluding energy and food prices, so-called core

wholesale prices increased 0.1 percent in November and 1.3 percent over the past 12 months.

"If you are worried about upside inflation risks, you need to look elsewhere," said Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

Both consumer and wholesale inflation have been running extremely low in the past year. High unemployment and weak wage increases have made it difficult for businesses to raise prices. Mild inflation has allowed the Federal Reserve more latitude to use its policies to try and stimulate growth. And some Fed officials have raised concerns that inflation is running too low. Energy costs have kept inflation well below

the Fed's 2 percent target. In November, gas costs tumbled 0.7 percent and home heating oil prices plunged 5.7 percent. The costs for new cars also fell 0.8 percent last month.

Consumers are benefiting from cheaper prices, particularly when they fill up their cars and trucks. The average national price for a gallon (3.8 liters) of gas was just \$3.25 on Friday, according to AAA's Daily Fuel Gauge Report.

The costs of raw materials such as corn, wheat, cane sugar, coal and iron ore have each fallen over the past 12 months. Those declines suggest that inflation should be held in check in the months ahead.

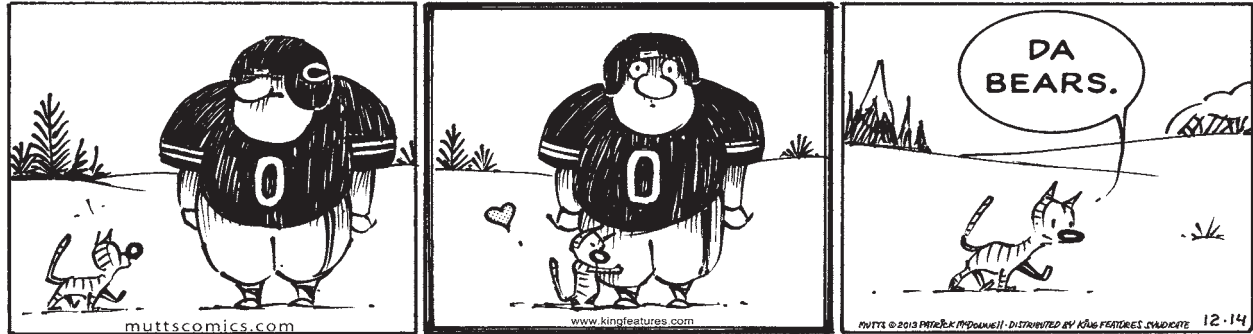
Wholesale food prices were flat last month. Pork

costs increased 5.6 percent, but the wholesale prices for bread rolls, muffins, bagels and croissants fell 4.2 percent after a sharp rise in October.

The Fed has said it will keep the short-term interest rate it controls at nearly zero at least until the unemployment rate falls below 6.5 percent and as long as inflation isn't expected to rise above 2.5 percent at an annual rate in the near future. The unemployment rate fell to 7 percent in November.

Low inflation has also allowed the Fed to continuing buying bonds to try and lower long-term interest rates. Fed officials meet on Tuesday and Wednesday to evaluate their interest rate policies. □

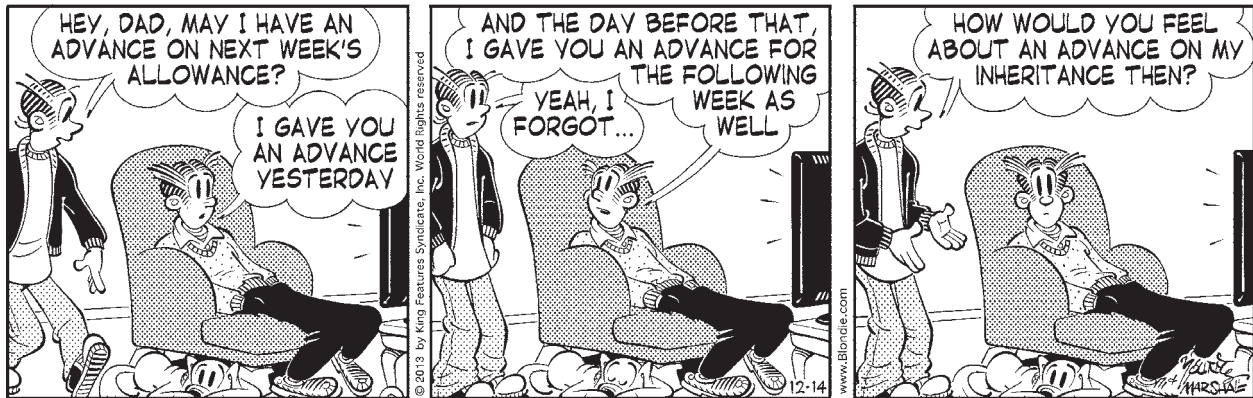
Mutts



6 Chix



Blondie



Mother Goose & Grimm



Baby Blues



Zits



Conceptis Sudoku

		2	4					
	4			8				1
	6			1				5
	8				5			9
3								8
6			9				7	
5				6			8	
9				3			2	
					9	7		

Difficulty Level
★★★★
12/14

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

3	8	9	2	5	1	7	4	6
6	7	1	3	4	8	5	2	9
4	5	2	9	6	7	3	8	1
8	9	5	7	3	6	2	1	4
1	2	4	5	8	9	6	7	3
7	3	6	1	2	4	9	5	8
5	6	7	8	1	3	4	9	2
2	4	8	6	9	5	1	3	7
9	1	3	4	7	2	8	6	5

ACROSS

- 1 Refuse to let in
4 Walked the floor
9 ___ suey; Chinese dish
13 Had debts
15 Make amends
16 Hawaiian island
17 2014, for one
18 Obeys
19 Radar screen image
20 Suffering from insomnia
22 Courts
23 Hit a fly
24 Female sheep
26 Talks back
29 Word game
34 Change slightly
35 Catches sight of
36 ___ away; fled
37 Unfair slant
38 Yanks
39 Start of a warning
40 Diminish
41 Send in one's payment
42 Fruity drink
43 Most dangerous
45 Visitor
46 Spring month; abbr.
47 Long steel bar
48 Bangkok native
51 Make laws
56 Messages
57 Happening
58 Yellow Brick ___; path to Oz
60 Make eyes at
61 Good judgment
62 Ricky Ricardo's portrayer
63 Hart or hind
64 Look of disdain
65 Coloring solution

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12
13			14		15					16			
17					18					19			
	20			21						22			
			23					24	25				
26	27	28				29	30			31	32	33	
34					35					36			
37					38					39			
40				41						42			
43			44					45					
			46				47						
48	49	50				51	52	53			54	55	
56						57				58		59	
60						61				62			
63						64				65			

Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews
12/14/13

Friday's Puzzle Solved

LABOR	ASAP	ROAM
AWARE	VAIL	ERGO
PARIS	OGRE	CARL
SYNOPSIS	BILLED	
DEFECT	LEAD	PERUSES
IVE	TACIT	SEATS
VEER	NOSES	SWAK
ENDED	RESTS	ELI
CIGAR	ELUDED	
FEDERAL	PEEP	
ERASER	DELIRIUM	
ANNS	DARE	GOOSE
SITE	EVER	HATES
TEES	NEWS	TRASH

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DOWN

- 1 Dutch ___; paint brand
2 Fills with holy wonder

- 3 Genuine
4 Grass plains of South America
5 Lopsided
6 Scoop holder
7 Conclusions
8 Apple pie and baked Alaska
9 Spider's creation
10 Ring of light atop a saint
11 Canton's state
12 Newborn dogs
14 Puts clothes on
21 Pitcher
25 "As I ___ saying..."
26 Cavalry sword
27 Excuse
28 Pierces
29 Divide
30 Young horse
31 Cook on a grill
32 Bicyclist ___
33 Go into
35 Totals
38 Unequaled

- 39 Dolt
41 ___ Van Winkle
42 Slammer
44 Title for former German rulers
45 Round wheel on the bottom of a sofa
47 Hose down
48 ___ on; trampled
49 Enormous
50 Competent
52 Smooth; level
53 Kelly or Barry
54 ___ the line;
55 Simple
59 Pass away

Does Bogota mayor's ouster threaten the peace process?

VIVIAN SEQUERA
Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Fighting for his political life, Bogota's leftist mayor convened supporters for a Friday rally, with some believing his dismissal could hurt attempts to make peace with the Americas' most powerful leftist rebel group. Gustavo Petro, a former rebel-turned-politician, wasn't just fired this week. He was also barred from elected office for 15 years by Colombia's inspector-general, a conservative ally of former President Alvaro Uribe.

Petro had alienated many since taking office last year with a high-handed, aloof style, and the inspector-general accused him of overreaching constitutionally. But he is a national figure, an anchor of the democratic left, and thousands were expected to converge on the capital's central Bolivar square Friday in solidarity.

An opinion poll published Friday found 54 percent of Bogota residents against Petro's ouster, with 38 percent in favor. The face-to-face poll this week of 400 people by Cifras y Conceptos had an error margin of 3 percentage points.

As a senator, Petro led investigations that uncovered collusion between killer far-right militias and Uribe allies, helping send dozens of officials to prison, and he finished fourth in 2010 presidential elections. He had been a militant with the M-19 rebel movement, whose 1990 peace pact is considered an inspiration for the government's current talks in Cuba with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. After Monday's announcement of sanctions against Petro, the FARC questioned how its members would be treated if they reach an accord.

It issued a statement that the measure is "a serious blow" to the government's credibility in year-long negotiations that have so far led to partial, confidential

agreements on land reform and rebel political participation.

The U.S. ambassador-designate to Colombia, Kevin Whitaker, was worried as well. He said at his Senate confirmation hearing on Wednesday that if Colombians interpret Petro's ouster as meaning the left won't be allowed to freely participate in the country's political life "the basic conditions for peace are going to be in some ways eroded."

Inspector-General Alejandro Ordonez ousted Petro not for alleged corruption — the case for his predecessor, who is now on trial — but for trying to fire private contractors in a bid to overhaul garbage collection in the capital. The attempt backfired as fetid piles of garbage amassed over three days before the mayor caved.

Still many doubt that Petro's ouster has weakened Colombian democracy or threatens peace, even if they disagree with the ruling.

That's the opinion of Antonio Navarro Wolff, a former M-19 rebel who has held nearly every political post available in Colombia, from congressman to mayor to Cabinet minister.

"What we have is a punishment that doesn't fit the crime," said Navarro Wolff, who quit in frustration as Petro's chief of staff last year after just three months on the job.

To keep his job, Petro must file an appeal to Ordonez. There is no other constitutional recourse, and a final ruling could take some weeks.

In the meantime, Petro has appealed to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights in Washington to issue an immediate stay barring Colombia from removing him. He was expected to travel there on Tuesday to meet with the commission's president.

Despite the controversy, there is no indication that Ordonez's job is threatened. □

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Astronaut may get Christmas wish for spacewalk

MARCIA DUNN

AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida

(AP) — Space station astronaut Rick Mastracchio may get his Christmas wish for a spacewalk or two because of a broken cooling system. Mastracchio, an experienced spacewalker, said he's more than ready to go out and make repairs, if deemed necessary by Mission Control.

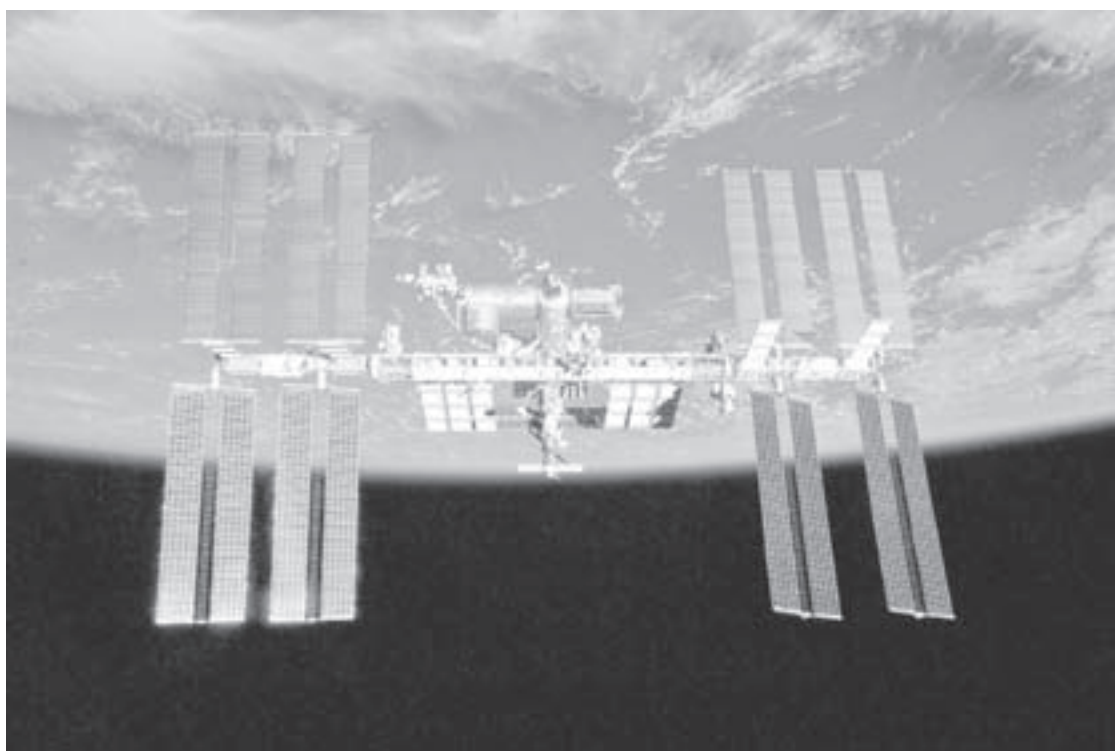
"Any time you have something like this, it's good news, bad news," Mastracchio told The Associated Press on Friday.

"Of course, the bad news is the station's having problems and we have to go out and do a repair. The good news is we have the spare parts.

We have the training. We have the skills and, of course, going out and doing a spacewalk is always very exciting — yet very challenging."

One of two cooling loops on the space station shut down Wednesday after it got too cold. Flight controllers suspect a bad valve inside an external pump.

It's a serious situation that needs to be remedied



In this image provided by NASA the International Space Station is shown with the backdrop of Earth. The image was photographed by an STS-132 crew member on space shuttle Atlantis after the station and shuttle began their post-undocking relative separation on May 23, 2010.

Associated Press

quickly, officials said, in case there are additional failures.

On Friday, engineers in Houston spent a third day working on the issue. They want to see if they can solve the problem remotely, before ordering up a series of spacewalks to replace the entire pump. Three spacewalks were required to in-

stall this pump in 2010.

The space station cooling system uses ammonia to dissipate heat generated by on-board equipment.

The six astronauts have turned off all nonessential equipment to reduce the heat load, including some science experiments. That's resulted in extra free time for Mastracchio and his

U.S., Japanese and Russian crewmates. Otherwise, life has not changed much a couple hundred miles up, he noted.

"We still have lights. We still have the toilet working. We still have food, and we're still very comfortable up here," Mastracchio said. "So the biggest problem is that we're just not taking

the time during our schedule to do as much science as we normally would."

An upcoming delivery mission may be delayed because of the cooling system trouble. The commercial Cygnus capsule, currently scheduled for a Wednesday launch from Wallops Island, Virginia, almost certainly holds holiday surprises for the astronauts, along with the usual stash of supplies. At least Mastracchio doesn't have to cram in any last-minute Christmas shopping, using the space station's Internet phone or online capability. The 53-year-old engineer said he bought presents for his wife before he rocketed into orbit at the beginning of November for a six-month mission.

"Being away from your friends and family during the holidays is not optimal," he told the AP. "But if you have to be away from your family on Christmas, then this is sure not a bad place to be."

And children, stay tuned.

"We're always on the lookout for Santa up here," Mastracchio said with a smile. □

Puerto Rico warns about dwindling numbers of frogs

DANICA COTO

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP)

— Three species of frogs native to the mountains of Puerto Rico have apparently disappeared from several critical habitats, a sign that a long decline in amphibians on the island shows no signs of letting up. Scientists on Thursday blamed the decline on climate change, habitat destruction and a fungus known as "bd" or *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*, which has killed dozens of amphibian species worldwide.

The species most at risk in Puerto Rico is the mountain coqui, which is now found only in portions of El Yunque forest and another

forest in the island's southern region, said Rafael Joglar, a herpetologist at the University of Puerto Rico.

"This species has basically retreated to the highest and coldest mountains of Puerto Rico," he said. "The problem is that it has nowhere higher to go."

It is one of the island's 17 endemic coqui species, which have long been a popular symbol of the U.S. territory.

The mountain coqui once lived in the western part of the island and across its central mountain range, but numbers there have since dwindled, and in some cases disappeared, said Jan Zegarra, a Puerto Rico-based biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Ser-

vice.

"People love the coquis of Puerto Rico, but they don't realize what's going on," Joglar said. "We don't need more investigations to protect this species. There is enough evidence to warrant protection."

While the coqui is originally from Puerto Rico, it has been found in Costa Rica and has formed large colonies in Hawaii, where it has no natural predators.

Joglar previously rejected the idea of breeding frogs in captivity to ensure their survival in Puerto Rico, noting they have died when introduced into the wild as adults, but he said that may be the only alternative now.

Scientists are using breed-



In this March 21, 2013 photo, Ana Longo, a researcher with Proyecto Coqui, holds a Coqui or Common Coqui (*Eleutherodactylus coqui*) at a tropical forest in Patillas, Puerto Rico.

Associated Press

ing programs in an attempt to save another one of the island's endangered species, the Puerto Rican crested toad. The Nashville Zoo in Tennessee has sent

more than 5,000 tadpoles to the U.S. territory, while the Buffalo Zoo in New York has sent hundreds of tadpoles in an effort to rebuild the wild population. □

Bruno Mars is Billboard's top artist of 2013

MESFIN FEKADU

AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Miley Cyrus twerked her way to the top of the charts and Justin Timberlake returned to music after a seven-year hiatus, but another artist owned music in 2013: Bruno Mars.

Billboard announced Friday that the pop crooner is the year's top overall artist. "It's flattering. It's just an honor," Mars said in an interview this week. "I'm proud to be a part of this whole team that I have."

The singer's year included a No. 1 hit with "When I Was

Your Man" and a top 5 hit with "Treasure." His sophomore album, "Unorthodox Jukebox," was released late last year and has sold more than 1.8 million units. It's the second best-selling album of the year behind Timberlake's "The 20/20 Experience."

Mars added that listeners have resonated with his music because it's "relatable."

"You know when you eat that food and it's filling that void you were missing," he said, describing his music.

Taylor Swift is the year's top female artist for Billboard,

while Mars is the leading male. Macklemore & Ryan Lewis is the top group and new act.

Timberlake ruled the R&B charts, while groups Florida George Line and Imagine Dragons topped the country and rock charts, respectively.

Mars' impressive year also includes four Grammy nominations. His No. 1 hit, "Locked Out of Heaven," is up for two of the top awards, song and record of the year. He'll launch the second North American leg of his "Moonshine Jungle World Tour" this summer. □



This image provided by Billboard shows Artist of the Year Bruno Mars on the cover of Billboard magazine. Billboard announced Friday, Dec. 13, 2013, that the pop crooner is the year's top overall artist.

Associated Press



This Oct. 9, 2012 file photo shows Led Zeppelin members, from left, Jason Bonham, Robert Plant, Jimmy Page and John Paul Jones at the "Led Zeppelin: Celebration Day" premiere in New York.

Associated Press

Spotify launches free mobile streaming service

NEW YORK (AP) — Music service Spotify has launched a new free streaming service for mobile devices.

The Swedish-based company announced Wednesday that it will allow users to stream playlists for free as long as the songs are shuffled randomly. It's a step closer to picking songs and albums on demand, a feature Spotify continues to reserve for premium members who pay \$10 a month.

Users can play an artist's entire catalog or their own playlists in shuffle mode. Free users won't be able to shuffle play a single album without hearing other songs mixed in.



Playlists that have too few songs will also have other songs mixed in. The free service launched Wednesday and includes ads.

Spotify also announced it is streaming the entire Led Zeppelin catalog. □

U.S. judge: Cheap Trick lawsuit dismissed

RANDALL CHASE

AP Business Writer

WILMINGTON, Delaware (AP) — A judge has dismissed a lawsuit filed by three members of Cheap Trick against the group's former drummer, saying the dispute should be decided in federal court in Illinois. The three musicians sought court validation of their purported ouster of drummer Brad Carlson, known as Bun E. Carlos, as a board member of the band's business entities earlier this year. But Chancellor Leo Strine Jr. said Thursday many issues in the Delaware lawsuit were raised in an earlier complaint filed in Illinois in which Carlos and former band manager David Frey claim their purported ousters were invalid, and that they are owed hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Strine says the fundamental issue is whether Carlson, who stopped touring with Cheap Trick three years ago, is still a member of the band. Guitarist Rick Nielsen, vocalist Robin Zander and bassist Tom Peterson sought a court declaration validating steps they took earlier this year to re-



In this June 11, 2009 file photo provided by the Las Vegas News Bureau, members of the band Cheap Trick, from left, Rick Nielsen, Robin Zander, Tom Petersson and Bun E. Carlos announce their September 2009 engagement "Sgt. Pepper Live" at the Las Vegas Hilton at a news conference in Las Vegas, Nev.

Associated Press

move Carlson as a board member of three band businesses incorporated in Delaware.

The longtime group, known for its use of vintage guitars on tour, gained acclaim over the decades with such hits as "Surrender," "I Want You to Want Me" and "Dream Police."

The band, minus Carlson, is still touring and is slated to headline a Mardi Gras event in New Orleans in March.

By agreement with other band members, Carlson stopped touring with the group in 2010. But he disputes their claims that he

is no longer a member of Cheap Trick and is not entitled to participate in its business affairs.

Carlson's attorneys argue that he was improperly ousted, citing a previous agreement that says any decision involving the band requires the unanimous consent of all four members.

Strine said Illinois, where the band formed in the 1970s and where two members still live, was a logical jurisdiction for resolving "garden-variety" questions of contract interpretation, including whether Carlson is still a member of the band.

The ladies of 'Anchorman 2' show Ron who's boss

JESSICA HERNDON

AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In the eyes of legendary newscaster Ron Burgundy, arguably Will Ferrell's most memorable character, this is a man's world. But in "Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues," it wouldn't be anything without a few saucy newsroom girls. As one of the most anticipated comedies of the year, the sequel to Paramount's "Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy" not only reunites Ferrell with Steve Carell, Paul Rudd and David Koechner, but Christina Applegate is back too — and she has reinforcements.

Reprising her role as anchorwoman Veronica Corningstone, Applegate returns with additional leading ladies: Kristen Wiig and Meagan Good. Wiig is receptionist Chani Lastname (pronounced Last-naw-may), the meek and kooky love interest to Carell's peculiar Brick Tamland, while Good wreaks havoc as the brazen boss of Ron and his newsroom posse. It's been a decade since the original "Anchorman" released to mixed reviews. The formula seemed ideal: Choice comedic actors like Ferrell, Carell and Rudd; an asinine approach to the newsroom culture of the 1970s; and signature lines like "I'm in a glass case of emotion!" (delivered by Ferrell).

But it performed below expectations at the box



This photo provided by Paramount Pictures shows, actresses Meagan Good, left, and Christina Applegate, on the Paramount Lot in the Hollywood section of Los Angeles. Good, Applegate, and Kristen Wiig star in "Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues," releasing in the US on Dec. 18, 2013.

Associated Press

office, earning \$84.3 million overall. Yet the second installment, which opens Dec. 18, could break the \$100 million mark overall, following an unabashed marketing campaign that had Ferrell doing all manner of publicity stunts.

"This new generation, those who were 10 years old when the first movie came out, have found it, so the popularity of it seemed to just grow," said Apple-

gate in a recent phone interview. "And the demand for it started to get bigger, so of course for the studio guys, that's like 'Oh yeah, we definitely have to do it.'"

Recognized for years for portraying Kelly Bundy in the sitcom "Married With Children," which aired on Fox from 1987-1997, the actress said her turn as Veronica has had its challenges. "The male characters in

this movie are strong and multi-dimensional, so I had to stand my ground and pull myself up and say 'Come on, you're in here too!'" said the 42-year-old actress. "I couldn't shrink away thinking I wasn't doing as good of a job." Applegate gave her co-star, comedy newcomer Good, the same pep talk. "I told her she had to stay up in their zone because her character is the powerhouse in this one," Applegate added.

"It made me feel good to know that Christina cared about me doing a good job," said Good, 32, who appeared in the 2012 hit "Think Like a Man."

As the only black female lead in the movie, Good plays the head of the newsroom. It's a notion that is heavily mocked in the plot. But Good had no problem tackling the tough material with what she calls "morbid humor."

"What I love about the brilliant minds of (director) Adam McKay and Will is they go full throttle and attack subjects like racism and sexism and make them light-hearted," she said. "It's great that they are shedding light on the fact that at that time, there weren't a lot of women dominating the workplace, especially black women." Added Wiig over the phone, "Meagan fit right in. It's definitely interesting that Will has a female boss and Ron Burgundy being Ron Burgundy has issues

with it. But it's great."

A huge fan of the original for its writing and because it has "all of the ingredients for a comedic classic," Wiig said she signed onto the sequel without laying eyes on the script.

"The pressure was definitely on, since this is such a beloved cast," said Wiig of her role as Chani, which Applegate described as "a great balance of not being too weird or adult." But the writer and star of the acclaimed comedy "Bridesmaids" held her own, as her character Chani is reminiscent of her quirky portrayals during seven years on "Saturday Night Live."

"It was really fun trying to come up with different ways that Chani and Brick could relate to each other," said the 40-year-old actress. "But when we did some improvising, it was hard to keep a straight face. Steve (Carell) is so quick! And personally once I start laughing, I have a really hard time stopping. I'm like 'I know the crew wants to go home. I'm sorry!'"

But off-camera, it was Wiig who had Good in stitches. "She texted me a picture of a chocolate microphone she'd received as a gift that she'd tucked into her bed with a message that read, 'Look at what I'm coming home to,'" chuckled Good.

"It doesn't feel like a boys club with the guys in this movie," added Wiig. "But it was nice to have ladies around." □



This Feb. 17, 2012 file photo shows Idina Menzel, left, and Taye Diggs at the 43rd NAACP Image Awards in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

MARK KENNEDY

AP Drama Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Married stage and film actors Idina

Menzel and Taye Diggs are splitting up.

A publicist for the couple announced the breakup

Idina Menzel and Taye Diggs are splitting up

Thursday in a statement that said the separation was "jointly decided" and that "primary focus and concern is for their son."

The pair met while appearing in "Rent" off-Broadway and married in 2003 after dating for seven years. They co-starred on Broadway in the show "Wild Party" in 2000 and on the TV

show "Private Practice."

Their son, Walker, was born in 2009.

Menzel, 42, made her Broadway debut in "Rent" and won a Tony as Elphaba in "Wicked." Her films include "Enchanted," "Rent" and "Ask the Dust." She also has launched a solo recording career and had a recurring role on TV

in "Glee." She is currently starring in the Broadway-bound musical "If/Then."

Diggs, 42, who has been onstage in "Chicago" and is best known for his role as Winston Shakespeare in the hit 1998 romantic film "How Stella Got Her Groove Back," recently starred in "The Best Man Holiday." □

Gop Punishment Cure



PAUL KRUGMAN
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Six years have passed since the U.S. economy entered the Great Recession, 4 1/2 since it officially began to recover, but long-term unemployment remains disastrously high. And Republicans have a theory about why this is happening. Their theory is, as it happens, completely wrong. But they're sticking to it - and as a result, 1.3 million American workers, many of them in desperate financial straits, are set to lose unemployment benefits at the end of December.

Merry Christmas.

Now, the GOP's desire to punish the unemployed doesn't arise solely from bad economics; it's part of a general pattern of afflicting the afflicted while comforting the comfortable (no to food stamps, yes to farm subsidies). But ideas do matter - as John Maynard Keynes famously wrote, they are "dangerous for good or evil." And the case of unemployment benefits is an especially clear example of superficially plausible but wrong economic ideas being dangerous for evil.

Here's the world as many Republicans see it: Unemployment insurance, which generally pays eligible workers between 40 and 50 percent of their previous pay, reduces the incentive to search for a new job. As a result, the story goes, workers stay unemployed longer. In particular, it's claimed that the Emergency Unemployment Compensation program, which lets workers collect benefits beyond the usual limit of 26 weeks, explains why there are 4 million long-term unemployed workers in America today, up from just 1 million in 2007.

Correspondingly, the GOP answer to the problem of long-term unemployment is to increase the pain of the long-term unemployed: Cut off their benefits, and they'll go out and find jobs. How, exactly, will they find jobs when there are three times as many job-seekers as job vacancies? Details, details. Proponents of this story like to cite academic research - some of it from Democratic-leaning economists - that seemingly confirms the idea that unemployment insurance causes unemployment. They're not equally fond of pointing out that this research is two or more decades old, has not stood the test of time, and is irrelevant in any case given our current economic situation.

The view of most labor econo-

mists now is that unemployment benefits have only a modest negative effect on job search - and in today's economy have no negative effect at all on overall employment. On the contrary, unemployment benefits help create jobs, and cutting those benefits would depress the economy as a whole.

Ask yourself how, exactly, ending unemployment benefits would create more jobs. It's true that some of the currently unemployed, finding themselves even more desperate than before, might manage to snatch jobs away from those who currently have them. But what would give businesses a reason to employ more workers as opposed to replacing existing workers?

You might be tempted to argue that more intense competition among workers would lead to lower wages, and that cheap labor would encourage hiring. But that argument involves a fallacy of composition. Cut the wages of some workers relative to those of other workers, and those accepting the wage cuts may gain a competitive edge. Cut everyone's wages, however, and nobody gains an edge. All that happens is a general fall in income - which, among other things, increases the burden of household debt, and is therefore a net negative for overall employment.

The point is that employment in today's American economy is limited by demand, not supply. Businesses aren't failing to hire because they can't find willing workers; they're failing to hire because they can't find enough customers. And slashing unemployment benefits - which would have the side effect of reducing incomes and hence consumer spending - would just make the situation worse. Still, don't expect prominent Republicans to change their views, except maybe to come up with additional reasons to punish the unemployed. For example, Sen. Rand Paul recently cited research suggesting that the long-term unemployed have a hard time re-entering the work force as a reason to, you guessed it, cut off long-term unemployment benefits. You see, those benefits are actually a "disservice" to the unemployed.

The good news, such as it is, is that the White House and Senate Democrats are trying to make an issue of expiring unemployment benefits. The bad news is that they don't sound willing to make extending benefits a precondition for a budget deal, which means that they aren't really willing to make a stand.

So the odds, I'm sorry to say, are that the long-term unemployed will be cut off, thanks to a perfect marriage of callousness - a complete lack of empathy for the unfortunate - with bad economics. But then, hasn't that been the story of just about everything lately? □



The Sweet Caress Of Cyberspace



FRANK BRUNI
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For a while I worried that my father was having a thing with his GPS.

He seldom referred to the navigational instrument, which issued instructions in a feminine monotone, as "it." He said "she" and "her." He got a kick out of predicting exactly when she'd pipe up and what her advice would be, and he alternately complimented himself on his obedience and crowed over his defiance.

"She's not going to like this," he'd trumpet as he played the rebel, going straight instead of left.

"Recalculating," she'd sigh, and he'd laugh mischievously. I thought of them when I saw "Her," a new movie that opens in major cities next week.

Joaquin Phoenix stars as a man in love with the operating system for his smartphone-esque device, a sexy Siri that - or should I say who? - tells him not only when he has mail but what a terrific male he is, and does this in Scarlett Johansson's come-hither coo. There was much fuss recently over the decision that Johansson was ineligible for the Golden Globes: Should a disembodied voice's contribution be regarded as any less real than a visible, palpable person's? The debate echoed questions in the movie itself, which was

written and directed by Spike Jonze and was just named the best picture of 2013 by both the National Board of Review and (in a tie with "Gravity") the Los Angeles Film Critics Association. "Her" is sure to be a talker. Set perhaps a few decades from now, when Los Angeles has sprouted so many skyscrapers that it resembles Shanghai, the story is in one sense absurdist. Man and operating system spend a warm day at the beach. Man and operating system spend a hot night in bed. But it simultaneously feels like the logical extrapolation of the way we log in now, and it's an all-you-can-eat allegory buffet. Choose your metaphor or cautionary tale - about the seductions of cyberspace; about how physically disconnected we are; about the shifting terms of intimacy - and it's here in abundance, first and second and third helpings of it.

I savored a few themes in particular. One is the Internet's extreme indulgence of the seemingly innate human impulse to contrive a habitat that's entirely unthreatening, an ego-stroking ecosystem, a sensibility-controlled comfort zone.

You want an endless stream of irony? You can have an endless stream of irony. You want unfettered invective about the politicians you've decided to hate? Set your bookmarks and social-media feeds accordingly. You can frolic endlessly in foregone conclusions. You can revel in the anecdotes that affirm your cynicism or articulate your fantasies, gullibly believing what's actually performance art, like a young television producer's tweet-by-tweet account of his smackdown of an annoying fellow passenger on a Thanksgiving flight. He was briefly a hero, his valor gone viral, until he revealed that he'd made the whole thing up.

In "Her," the very nature of Johansson's operating system is to adapt to and evolve from her interactions with Phoenix.

She's a projection of his needs. She blooms in accordance with his wants (and has an aurally explosive orgasm on cue). He needn't doubt himself, compromise or color outside the lines. "Her" takes what's happening in American politics and so much of American culture and transfers it to the realm of romance.

It's a parable of narcissism in the digital world, which lets you sprint to the foreground of everything, giving you an audience or the illusion of one. To monitor Facebook or Twitter right after Nelson Mandela's death last week was to be struck by how many people weren't so much passing along the news as laying claim to it: Here's what I thought of him. Here's when I intersected with him. Here's the personal reverberation.

But "Her" also traces the flip side of the coin - that with our amassed knowledge and scientific accomplishments, we may be succeeding in rendering ourselves obsolete. Around the same time that I saw the movie, Jeff Bezos sketched out his plans for delivery by drone. The New York Times published a front-page account of Google's grand designs for robots in manufacturing and shipping. And a video producer I know returned from a shoot at a food production plant shocked that she hadn't laid eyes on many people. Just a small posse of engineers and a slew of machines. Economists have sounded the alarm about what this could mean for employment and the distribution of wealth. It falls to artists to contemplate what this could mean for psyches and souls, and "Her" imagines a society in which human beings are so thoroughly marginalized that they're being edited out of courtship and companionship, because they're superfluous, messy. It's a love story as horror story. If we no longer need anyone in the passenger seat, do we need anyone at all? □

This year, NYC SantaCon aims to curb ho-ho no-no's

JENNIFER PELTZ

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When red-suited revelers throng the city's streets and taverns under the banner of SantaCon, a meandering Kris Kringle convention, some see an outpouring of holiday spirit, not to mention spirits. But to others, it's the blight before Christmas. After complaints about boorish, bar-hopping St. Nicks got attention from local officials and police, the event's ringleaders are trying to quell the SantaCon-troverly ahead of this year's gathering Saturday. They're pledging to advise police of their usually guarded plans, have volunteers help control the roving crowd of Kringles and send the message that SantaCon is a meant to be a "festive culture jam," not a bad-Santa bender.

"This year," the event's website vows, "we are cleaning up Santa's act." It's a coming-of-age moment for SantaCon, which traces its origin to a consumer-culture-tweaking "Santarchy" in San Francisco in 1994 and now spans events in more than 300 cities worldwide. Fueled by the wildfire word-spreading of social media, the New York celebration has become one of the biggest, mushrooming in roughly a decade from a few hundred bearded boozers to tens of thousands, by some

estimates.

As numbers have swelled, the event's image has morphed from whimsical flash mob to flashpoint, even for New Yorkers used to such freewheeling shindigs as the giant Greenwich Village Halloween Parade. SantaCon's organizers are as tough to pin down as the elf himself — one responded to an inquiry from The Associated Press but refused to be quoted by name — but the site acknowledges the event "has had growing pains."

Enthusiasts say the day-long event starts at 10 a.m. and aims to put a cheeky, modern spin on holiday traditions — "don we now our gay apparel," anyone? — while generating money for both bars and charities. Participants are instructed to make \$10 charitable donations and encouraged to bring small gifts to bestow on one another and passers-by.

"For me, SantaCon is about just dressing up and having fun, laughing till it hurts and enjoying being part of a massive celebration. ... It isn't about drinking or getting wasted," says Brandon Ferreira-Hanyo, 27, of East Quogue, New York. He's looking forward to attending for a third consecutive year. "It's gotten so huge you have to take the good with the bad," he says, but he feels the complaints



Revellers dressed up in Santa gather at Trafalgar Square in London during a SantaCon festival in London. SantaCon events unfold in more than 300 cities worldwide and the New York celebration is one of the biggest, but complaints about boorish, bar-hopping St. Nicks at previous SantaCons got attention from local officials and the NYPD.

(AP Photo/Sang Tan, File)

about drunken rowdiness are overblown.

Bar owners are split. To Dan Warren, the managing owner of Common Ground, a hangout in Manhattan's East Village, "it's festive and fun" and a boost to daytime business. But SantaCon-goers are frozen out of Hotel Chantelle, a cocktail lounge in Manhattan's Lower East Side, after a sloshed Claus harassed women brunching there two years ago, managing partner Tim Spuches said. To some onlookers, SantaCon is about as jolly as explaining to a kindergarten why Santa just

tossed his milk and cookies. "Take your body fluids and public intoxication elsewhere," read "SantaCon free zone" signs that appeared this week on the bar-laden Lower East Side, where some residents already weary of living with nightlife see SantaCon as a final straw.

"Now we have a whole day of vomiting and vandalism and people acting without any decorum or respect for other people," says Diem Boyd, a leader of LES Dwellers, the group that made the signs. "I think anything quaint about it is gone by now." So do some police and politicians.

The New York Police Department logged a sole, disorderly-conduct arrest at SantaCon last year, along with 73 open-container tickets and a summons for public urination. That was enough for at least one police lieutenant, who suggested to midtown Manhattan bars that the event hurt the neighborhood more than it helped the establishments.

Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly then made clear the department supports SantaCon, calling it generally peaceful and an example of "what makes New York New York."

But some city and state officeholders also were

pressing the organizers to thwart misbehavior, and threatening to ask police and bars to do so if SantaCon wouldn't. Meanwhile, some of the area's commuter railroads are banning alcoholic drinks on their trains during the celebration, as they do during some other events.

And so, organizers say, a more orderly SantaCon is coming to town.

They agreed to let police and community leaders know their planned route, which participants learn only in real time by text and tweet. Volunteer Santa's helpers will help work to keep sidewalks — and participants' conduct — passable, according to the event website and to state Sen. Brad Hoylman, who spearheaded a recent phone conference between officials and SantaCon leaders. Hoylman says he appreciates the effort but wonders how much sway volunteers can exercise over an event that prizes spontaneity.

Leading up to it, SantaCon's wranglers are trying to instill a sense of responsibility, if in an in-your-bearded-face way.

"Santa spreads JOY. Not terror. Not vomit. Not trash," the site says. "Would you want those under YOUR tree?" □



Revellers dressed up in Santa outfits travel on a bus in London during a SantaCon festival parade through the streets of London.

(AP Photo/Sang Tan)